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PUBLISHER AND BOOKSELLER
5513 Larchwood Avenue
Philadelphia

BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN WOMEN

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BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN MEN
First Series

BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN MEN
Second Series

BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN WOMEN
First Series

WORDS OF THIS LIFE

THE DISEASE AND REMEDY OF SIN

BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN WOMEN

First Series

BY THE REV.
W. MACKINTOSH MACKAY, B.D.
SHERBROOKE CHURCH, GLASGOW

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1929

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PREFACE

THE encouraging reception of the author's *Bible Types of Modern Men* has led to the issue of this companion volume on 'Bible Women.' Like the former, it consists mainly of Sunday-evening lectures; and this must be its apology, if such be needed, for its generally popular and practical character. The author's object has been to turn the faces of these women of other days to our own times and paint them in the light of to-day.

In some cases it may seem that these portraits have a certain 'twist in the neck,' from this desire to satisfy a too obvious posturing. But, in the majority of cases at least, the author ventures to think that he has been an expositor first and a portrait-painter afterwards; and he trusts the attempt

to combine the two purposes will lend interest and utility to these studies. He desires to express his indebtedness to the Rev. Robert M. Stewart, M.A., and the Rev. Geo. P. M'Dougall, who have kindly revised the proofs.

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I

THE WOMANLINESS OF JESUS

'Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? . . . Some say Elias; and *others, Jeremias.*'—MATT. xvi. 13, 14.

'THE contemporaries of superior men,' says one of themselves, 'are very apt to go wrong about them. An original personality confuses them; the swift current of passing events distorts their vision and prevents them understanding or even recognising such a man.'[1] That was supremely true of One whom His contemporaries nailed to a cross, yet, in spite of that, we may learn not a little that is suggestive from the impression He made upon them.

In our text we see Jesus asking His disciples what His contemporaries thought about Him? He did so from no diseased vanity, but because He had come to save them and yearned to know whether they were ready to be saved. To that question

[1] Goethe.

the disciples gave a very honest reply. It was a disappointing one, and yet it was interesting too. There was no evidence that the people had realised the stupendous greatness of Christ. Yet they evidently thought Him a very wonderful man. Some supposed that He was John the Baptist come to life again. Others saw in Him a reincarnation of some of the grandest prophets of their past. The two they specially fixed upon were very interesting in their contrast. One was Elias, the mighty man of action, perhaps the most manly of all the prophets; the other was Jeremias, the mighty man of thought, perhaps the most womanly of all that 'goodly fellowship.'

There is, I say, something deeply suggestive about that contrast. Out of all the men of the Old Testament none could have been selected more unlike in the whole texture of their character and life than these two. On the one hand is Elijah, bold, self-reliant, commanding; a fearless leader of the people, a man among men. On the other is Jeremiah, not less courageous certainly in the end of the day than Elias—nay,

far more so than he—yet at the beginning certainly a most shrinking, timid man, 'the reluctant prophet' as he has been called—with much more of the woman about him than the man. What was there in common with these two? Little or nothing. Except that they were both sent forth by God to rebuke the sins of the people, the two men were utterly opposed.

Yet it was to each of these Christ was likened. In the young prophet men saw something that reminded them, now of the thunder tones of the great Elias, now of the melting accents of the still greater Jeremias. 'Some say Thou art Elias, but others Jeremias.'

What does it teach us about Christ? Does it not teach us, for one thing, how big He was? How diversified must that personality have been which impressed men so differently! There is a mountain in Switzerland which has on one side a sweet and gentle slope, with chalets and fruit-laden orchards nestling up its ample bosom. You climb up among these embowered cottages and leave the children playing in the sun, till, through steep and barren crags, you reach the crested

summit. Then—what a contrast! A wild yawning precipice on the other side, beetling over fathomless gulfs that reach into a gloomy vale on which the sun seems never to shine. It is a different mountain.

So would it seem to have been with Christ. His personality was multiform. This was the secret of His universal charm. Men of all kinds and classes came to Him because He had something for them all. 'All men seek for Thee,' said the disciples. It was a true word. He had a meaning for every soul. He had a medicine for every wound. He had a key for every heart's door. To Him came the cultured Scribe, the unlettered Galilean, the self-righteous Pharisee, the self-convicted publican, children pure as the snowflake, and the Magdalene like that same snowflake when trampled in city streets—all drawn by that wonderful universality of His nature, that combination of strength and tenderness, that harmony of all that is best in man and woman;—'to some Elias, but to others Jeremias.'

It is the second, *the Jeremias type of character*, I want specially to dwell upon

to-night—*the womanliness of Jesus*. This, I venture to think, was the most original contribution made to history by the character of the man Christ Jesus. John Stuart Mill has some famous words about the originality of the character of Jesus. Yes; and one of the most original elements in that character was the *womanliness of it*.

Before Christ came the great type of heroism was the *Elias* type. Strength of arm, prowess in the field of battle, these were the virtues which ancient sentiment glorified. The ideal of strength it exalted: of the glory of gentleness it knew little. It could sing hymns in honour of the soldier who fell fighting for his country, but of the Florence Nightingale who came when the battle was over to minister to the wounded, it knew nothing.

Such virtues, indeed, it would have despised as weak and soft. Is it not significant that the great women of antiquity were largely those who were able to get beyond their sex and assume the valour of men? Jael, the wife of the Kenite, because she 'put her hand to the nail'; Deborah because she led the armies of Israel when Barak was

womanish and soft; the Spartan mother when she told her boy to come home from the battle either with his shield or on it; Lucretia when she plunged the dagger into her dishonoured body—these were the heroines of antiquity.

It is a famous line of Latin poetry, 'I am a man, and I count nothing that is manly foreign to me.' But do you know when it was first used? It was put by a Roman dramatist into the mouth of a father when he was upbraiding his wife, because she was clinging to her baby-girl and pleading that she should not be cast out to death, or to be caught up by night-harpies for a fate that was even worse than death. To be a true man was to be hard, indifferent, cruel. To be a great woman was to copy that, so far as it was possible for a woman to do so.

But when Jesus came He changed all that. He did so by raising up beside the old ideal of strength a new one of gentleness. To the glory of the lion He added the sweetness of the lamb. No one could ever say there was anything weak or soft about the man Christ Jesus. There is no nobler type of manhood than the manliness of Christ.

See Him as, with scathing denunciation, He lays bare the hypocrisy of Scribe or Pharisee. 'Woe unto you, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?' What tremendous language! Well may prophecy call Him 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah.' Or see Him again in Pilate's judgment-hall, calm before the storm of hate and passion, as He is presented in Munkacsy's great picture. Well might Pilate say, 'Behold the Man!' Was there ever man more noble, more courageous, than the man Christ Jesus?

'To some Elias.' Yes, but along with this there was a tenderness, a compassion, such as the world had never seen before. Who is this that takes the children in His arms and blesses them one by one? Who is this that raises the fallen woman to a new undreamed-of purity? Who is this that stands and weeps at the grave of Lazarus? Who is this that calls to weary men, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and I will give you rest'? Who is this that bursts into tears over the vision of doomed Jerusalem?

'Tis the Lord! O wondrous story!
'Tis the Lord, the King of Glory!'

'To some Elias'; yes, but 'to others Jeremias.'

And by so doing Christ has left us a new ideal both for man and woman. He has left us first of all *a new ideal for man*, for He has shown that strength does not exclude tenderness, and that a character in which courage and self-reliance are combined, finds its crown in tenderness to the weak and in pity to the fallen. Is not that what we mean by 'the grand old name of *gentleman*,' the character that is manly and yet gentle?

Young men have many temptations to-day to forget this ideal. You are tempted to put on a hardness which you do not really possess, because you think it right to do so. Business makes us hard. In the rough scramble of the market-place we get into a ruthless, pitiless state of mind. 'Get on or get out' is the creed of many business houses. There is no consideration for the frail or the old. Life is a struggle for survival. The ethics of the wolf-pack is good enough for some Christian men.

Surely Christ has not lived in vain! Surely He has taught us a higher manhood

than that! As a matter of fact, the greatest heroes of the world have been gentle men. England produced two soldiers of supreme merit in the last century. But which was the hero of his country? Which is the man we love? Is it the Iron Duke? No; it is the man who, dying in the battleship, was not ashamed to say 'Kiss me, Hardy!' Yes, as the German says, 'It is the eternal womanly draws us on.' If you wish to be a man in the grandest sense of that word, you must be a *gentle* man—to the courage of Elias you must add the tenderness of Jeremias.

But Christ has not only left us in His character a new ideal for man, He has also left us *a new ideal for woman.*

What does 'the womanliness of Jesus' teach the womanhood of our age? To be womanly, you will say. Yes; I believe it does teach us that. And perhaps that is a lesson too for to-day. This is a great time for woman's rights. The woman's movement is one of the questions of the hour. Certainly in many of its aspects it is a movement I heartily approve of. When it means

the opening of new doors to woman's usefulness, it is in line with the advancement of all that is best in the race. No doubt home is the ideal sphere for woman; but there cannot be homes for all. Women must be allowed to earn their own bread when there are no men to earn it for them, and they should be allowed to earn it in the way best suited to their talents and abilities. I therefore thoroughly approve of the higher education of women and the opening of the professions to all who are able to fill them.

Nevertheless, is there not a danger here; the danger that women in the rough and tumble of public life will get hard and unwomanly—in a word, mannish? A modern writer, in an essay I was reading lately, says that highly educated women, not to speak of public women, tend to become unwomanly. Men are repelled by them, and will wed with a fool rather than mate with an iceberg.

Is that true? I am inclined to think there is a good deal of truth in it. Stevenson says when a man marries he 'domesticates his recording angel.' That is a serious enough step at all times, but when the angel

becomes a superior Michal who 'despises him in her heart,' the prospect becomes sufficiently appalling.

Yet, after all, such a man makes a big blunder. For, to quote Stevenson once again, 'A man who marries a fool makes one of those mistakes for which men pay in *this* life.' Some men have a fondness for dolls. But such dolls'-houses, as the Norwegian dramatist reminds us, are very apt to come to the ground in a tempest. What a man truly needs is a woman with a *mind* and a *heart* as well. As Wordsworth says:

> 'A perfect woman, nobly planned,
> To warn, to comfort, to command;
> And yet a spirit still and bright,
> With something of an angel's light.'

And, thank God, there have been such women all down the ages, women of the highest culture, and yet women to their finger-tips; women of gentleness and refinement. Such are the women that lead the world; not the noisy, rude, self-assertive, self-styled 'leaders of women,' but those whose 'gentleness' makes them 'great.'

'The womanliness of Jesus' teaches women to be womanly in *heart*, and it also

teaches them to be womanly in *faith*. There is as much danger to women as to men, that the increase of knowledge should mean a diminution of faith. 'Leave thou thy sister when she prays,' said Tennyson long ago; but now the sister does not need to be left. She has become too superior to pray. Having read a few pages of Kant or Hegel, she complains that the Church 'has nothing to give her'; that the preacher is not 'up to her intellectual level.'

It is a vast pity—for herself. What a loss woman incurs when, like Mary at the sepulchre, she has to say of her teachers, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.' We see its pathos in such a woman as Jane Welsh Carlyle—bright, clever, attractive, but with a heart embittered and desolate.

And what a loss, too, to others. Woman's faith and woman's work are among the Church's chief assets. Christ was woman's friend while on earth, but nobly did she repay His love. In life she was His comforter; in death His chief mourner; in Resurrection His herald and foremost helper. As Guthrie has put it: 'If it be true

that woman owes more to religion than man, it is equally true that religion owes more to her. You have only to travel through the Christian households of any land to find that there are more women than men, more wives than husbands, more sisters than brothers who are living under the influence of true religion. Many more children have to refer their earliest and deepest impressions to a mother's than to a father's piety.'

Much would our land suffer if our woman's faith decayed out of it. Yes, and much would woman suffer herself. Guthrie puts an 'if' before his statement, but surely there is no question whatever that woman does owe more to Christianity than man. You have only to hear the cries of heathen womanhood to know that. You have only to read the account of woman's life and lot in the Indian zenana, the Chinese torture-chamber, the African kraal, to know that. Yes, and if Christianity were to die out of these islands and faith to become a bygone dream, and the religion of the 'survival of the fittest' to take the place of the worship of the Cross, it would be woman

who would pay the price. A people without Christ is a land without chivalry.

But while the character of Jesus Christ thus teaches women to be womanly, womanly in heart and faith, it has also a stronger and more virile message. I remember some one saying, 'We say, Young men, be strong! young women, be gentle! We should rather say, Young men, be gentle! young women, be strong!'

It is true; and that is part of the message of our text. The gentle Jesus was the strongest of the strong. The Lamb of God was the Lion of Judah. The tender 'Jeremias' was also the fearless 'Elias.'

There are some women who seem to make it their maxim in life to be 'all things to all men.' Like Polonius, they are willing to 'fool Hamlet to the top of his bent' if only they can manage to please him. They have no convictions of their own; no fidelity to conscience; no strength or courage to be true to themselves.

How different from the early women of Christianity! One of the contributions Christianity made to history was a new

womanhood. 'What women these Christians have!' men said. Yes; they were no mere toys or dolls, these woman martyrs of the faith. They were ready to meet

> '. . . the tyrant's brandished steel,
> The lion's gory mane'

rather than yield their allegiance to the Lord they loved so well. Such too were the women of the Scottish Covenant, who beheld their husbands lying bleeding corpses at their feet, and yet were able to say with unflinching courage that they never liked them better than when thus they lay. Such are the women we need in our land in the world to-day. And not till we have them, not till our womanhood rises strong and pure at the touch of Jesus Christ, to be all that He loved her for, and died that she might be, not till then will our country be saved or our world redeemed.

II

THE WOMAN OF TACT

'And when Abigail saw David, she . . . fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be.'—1 Sam. xxv. 23, 24.

The story of Abigail owes part of its charm to its unexpectedness. Sometimes in sweeping through the black country you get a hurried glimpse from the window of your express of some exquisite piece of nature's loveliness—a quiet stream, perhaps, over whose wood-embowered waters a boat with a girl reading is gently floating—and the vision set in blackened fields and smoke-begrimed horizons fills your mind with a sweet surprise. So is it with the story of this woman of gentleness and wisdom. Truly 'her gentleness makes her great.' In the midst of the angry passions of men she blooms with all the sweetness of a 'lily among thorns.'

But if Abigail is the more beautiful for her

dark surroundings, her character is in itself well worthy of our study and admiration. She is the ideal married woman of the Bible. Others had perhaps more heroic qualities, but she is the most essentially feminine of all the notable women of Scripture. She has what is possibly the most useful of all woman's gifts for life's common path. She has tact. There are but few women who are called, like Deborah, to lead their countries' armies; or, like Jephthah's daughter, to die for their father's honour; but every one may imitate (and some have much need to do so) the womanly wisdom and power of managing men which are so conspicuous in the story of Abigail.

At the time that story opens David had fled for refuge to the desert of Judah. There for some years he lived the life of an outlaw. His means of subsistence seems to have been that of a kind of unofficial policeman to the district. He protected the farmers from the Bedouin tribes, and expected in return a yearly contribution for the support of his men. One of the largest of these was a man who was named, or more probably nicknamed, Nabal, the fool. So

extensive was his domain that it contained two villages, while on its hills browsed three thousand sheep and one thousand goats. Such a farm would not be counted large to-day, but the relative values of things are much changed since David's time; nor had the Jews of Palestine the power to expatriate the peasants to make room for sheep and deer. A man was 'better than a sheep' in these days. Nabal was what we would call to-day 'a successful man.' But there his greatness ended. To begin with, he was very stupid. Even his wife had to admit that. 'Nabal is his name and folly is with him.' We may wonder that a fool would have been so successful. But the same thing often happens still. Family, influence, fortune—these do as much to-day as brains and hard work.

Then Nabal, like most stupid successful men, was intensely conceited. He suffered perennially from swelled-head. The thought of these three thousand sheep on the hills was always with him. He made frequent references to his goats in his brilliant conversation. In other words, he was a vulgar purse-proud boor.

Not a pleasant picture; but, I am sorry to say, still worse is to follow. In addition to his engaging qualities of stupidity and conceit, he had a most ungovernable temper. So passionate was he at times that his wife was often afraid to tell him unpleasant truths. Specially was this the case when 'the drink was on him.' For, in addition to his other bad qualities, he was the victim of intemperance. He always took his wine after dinner, and he usually took too much.

A pretty man for a husband! And yet, is he unexampled to-day? Alas no! There is nothing extinct about this species. He is living still. You can see him almost any day in our streets, rolling along to business in his motor, the great, stupid plutocrat, hardly able to put two sentences together, yet somehow successful in his 'deals,' swelled out with pomposity and conceit, and devoting his evenings to feeding his own vanity and beastly appetite.

It was shearing time—Nabal's great harvest, when he took stock of his year's results, and when it was customary to pay his debts. This had been a specially good one. The

returns had been enormous, and that was in no small degree due to David and his men, who had been 'a wall of fire' to the whole neighbourhood. So David, after possibly waiting to see if Nabal was to make any recognition of this, sends him a polite reminder of his services. 'I have protected you with my army during the summer. Will you not protect me with your wool during the winter?' It was a reasonable request, though not strictly legal; but when Nabal received it he completely lost his temper. 'There are many servants nowadays,' he snarled, 'who are breaking away from their masters. Do you think I am going to encourage a perverse rebel?' When David heard it, his worst passions were aroused. He swore a furious oath that before the next morning deepened into night, Nabal's homestead would be a scene of blackened, blood-stained ruins. What a change to the David of other days! The David, for example, that Jonathan knew and loved. The David that met Saul's hatred with unrelenting forgiveness. So does injustice deteriorate the most noble character. When 'the rod of the wicked

rests long on the lot of the righteous,' there is a danger 'lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity.'

But now it is that the true heroine of this story steps glorious upon the scene. This churlish boor, among his other successes, had contrived to get a wife who was all too good for him. The Bible describes her as 'of a good understanding and a beautiful countenance.' In other words, her face was as comely as her mind was clever.

The union is unfortunately by no means uncommon; but one cannot help wondering how such a husband had contrived to get such a wife. Possibly, like most Eastern marriages, it was an 'arrangement' with Abigail's father in which she had little control, for I cannot get myself to believe that a woman like her would have married Nabal for his fortune; though I must sadly confess that some women to-day will eagerly take the most utter sheep or goat for a husband—if only he has three thousand *other* sheep on the hills, or one thousand *other* goats in the stalls!

To Abigail, then, one of the household runs and tells that David and four hundred men

are marching on the homestead, hot with revenge. Like a clever woman, she has her plans made almost in a moment. Lading her asses with all the good things in her larder, she hastens to meet the infuriated outlaw ere he can strike the first blow.

It was a strange encounter. On the one side, four hundred outlaws wild with anger and cupidity; on the other, a lone woman with a few terrified servants crouching behind. A woman against an army! Yes, but a woman of tact—and that proves enough to conquer a regiment. Notice how she does it. First of all she stoops to conquer. Falling prostrate on the ground, she begins by taking the blame of the whole sorry business on herself. 'Upon me, my lord,' she says, 'let this iniquity be.' In other words, she acknowledges that David and his men have a perfect right to be aggrieved. 'Your quarrel,' she says, 'is most just and natural.'

How different this from some women! When a controversy arises between them and their husbands, they immediately begin to argue in ever heightening tones to prove that they are right and he is wrong! It

may be so, but what have you gained when you have proved it? Men are not the better pleased because it is triumphantly shown that they are unreasonable brutes. A prudent woman will be content to let it be proved a hundred times over that she was in the wrong, so long as she gains her right. 'Upon me, my lord, let this iniquity be.'

Her next move is even more skilful. With that mixture of humour and serious purpose which more than anything turns wrath away—for a smile ever kills a frown—she next refers to her husband's hasty words. 'Why mind him?' she says; 'you know his name is Fool. You can't expect anything but folly from the Fool.' Now, I dare say some of you may think that was not acting a very loyal part to her husband; but for my part I do not see how better she could have referred to him at all. Nor did it mean she was disloyal to her husband because she criticised him in public. Many women have a way of criticising their husbands before folks, sometimes pretty severely, and yet they do not mean anything by it. You would see that, if only

you were to agree with their criticisms and begin to add some of your own. *Then* you would see them at once flying in your face in their 'man's' defence. No; it is only a way they have!

So having won the ear of David, Abigail goes on to her main request. Very skilful, very striking is the way she advances it. She does not directly ask *anything*. Rather does she take it for granted that what she asks has already been given by David's generous heart. 'The Lord,' she says, '*hath* withholden you from the shedding of blood.' *Hath*; the tense is past. It was impossible, when the matter was put before such a man as David was, that it could ever be present. Then, rising to a higher key, she prophesies that in return for his kindness to a defenceless woman, God will yet avenge him of more real foes, and give him a sure passage out of every ill. 'I know,' she says, with a tactful reference to David's fugitive condition, 'that there is a man risen up against thee to do thee hurt; but as once you slang out a stone at a giant's head, so now you will surely sling out every enemy that can rise up against you. For,' she concludes.

'your soul is bound up in the bundle of life with Jehovah God. No *man* can touch it there.'

Can we wonder that, after words so graciously eloquent, David was not only turned from his purpose of vengeance, but moved to bless her whose house a few hours before he had devoted to fire and sword. 'Blessed be thou,' he cried. 'Blessed be thou of Jehovah! Thou hast kept me back from shedding blood that was indeed far better than innocent.'

Such was the tact of Abigail. But the story had a tragic termination. We have seen how a wise woman is the saving of her husband's life. We have now to see how, spite of all her efforts, a fool's folly will end in death. For when she returned that night it was to find her husband in a drunken stupor. He had been celebrating his harvest-home, and, like men of his class, could not be happy without getting intoxicated. Wise by experience, she says not a word of what has happened. But next morning, when he is somewhat better, she ventures to tell him of the exciting experiences of yesterday. One would have thought he would have been

pleased, and would have praised the wifely prudence which had saved his cattle, if he did not value his wife and servants. But no; the thought she has given away his property—these cheeses and raisins and figs—to that impudent freebooter, and without telling *him*, drives him into another tremendous passion. His face purples with fury; the veins stand out like whip-cords on his brow; the furious words pour like an avalanche of fire from a volcano; mayhap he even rises to strike the victim of his passion—when suddenly all is over! He falls back; his jaw drops; his eyes roll glassy in their sockets. Nabal's little day is done. His folly has crowned itself, as it always does in the end, with a chaplet of disaster and of death. The words of Scripture—'He became as dead as a stone'—are a vivid picture of the apoplectic fit caused by his ungovernable fury, no doubt induced by a life of habitual intemperance. For nine days he lingered unconscious of all things. On the tenth he passed away. Can we wonder if, when all was over, a sigh of half-conscious relief mingled with the sob of sorrow as she closed the eyes that had so

seldom opened with any other expressions than those of cupidity and hatred.

Shortly afterwards David proposed marriage to his beautiful comforter. In these days widowhood was a defenceless condition, and we can hardly blame Abigail if she soon forgot her drunken husband and accepted the hand of the man whose heart she had so strangely won.

Such is the story of Abigail. I have dwelt on it at length because its simple telling is the best reinforcement of the lesson it is fitted to teach. That lesson in a word is, *the value of prudence to a woman, and specially to a married woman.* Abigail may be regarded, as I have said, as the ideal married woman of the Bible. She possessed in harmonious combination these two qualities which are valuable to any one, but which are essential to one who has to manage men—*the tact of a wise wife* and *the religious principle of a good woman.*

What is tact? It may be defined as that *spiritual sensibility which instinctively knows not merely the right thing to say, but what is much less common, when to say it and how to say it.* A modern writer has

put it into verses which are perhaps worth quoting:

'What is tact? 'Tis worth revealing.
'Tis delicacy's finest feeling.
It is to scan another's breast
To know the thought ere half expressed
If word or tone should waken pain,
To drop the subject or the strain;
To come around with winning art
And gently steal away the heart.'

This rare quality Abigail possessed in no ordinary degree. We can see that suggested even by her handling of her husband, though in his case it seems to have been largely thrown away. When she comes home and finds him intoxicated, she puts off her unpleasant news till the morning. How different this from some wives! No sooner does the husband return home at night weary and tired and hungry, than they begin to pour into his ears a bitter tale of the misfortunes that have occurred to them during his absence, and thus destroy at one fell stroke his temper and his digestion!

But still more do we see Abigail's tact in her dealings with David. If ever woman was placed in a difficult position Abigail was; with her foolish husband on the one

side and the infuriated outlaw on the other. Yet how successfully does she carry it through! Not only does she gain her request, but she touches at once the conscience and the heart of her enemy. It is hard to tell a man he is doing wrong and yet keep him from taking offence at you. None but a minister knows how hard. Yet that was what Abigail did.

And how did she manage this? Because she was a woman of tact? Yes, first of all; but also because she was a woman of *religion* too. She is not afraid to tell David he is acting wrongly. She does so gently, tactfully indeed; but she does so none the less firmly. And in this we see where the strength and glory of a true woman lies. There are some women so weak and foolish that they are willing to barter away everything for their power to please. They seem to think that their power over men consists in being as silly as possible. The story of Abigail teaches a truer lesson. No woman ever lost any affection that was worth possessing by holding firm to her religious principles. Religion is the crown of womanhood, and the woman who wins the respect

and lasting affection of her son or husband, her brother or lover, is not she who is willing to yield everything to his whim or prejudice, but she who is true to herself by first of all being true to God.

How sweet must the words of Abigail have sounded to the weary fugitive, 'I know that thy soul is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.' What a new strength it must have given to his soul as they recurred afterwards in his memory! Yet how many of us never venture on religious themes with those we love! Mr. Zangwill, the novelist of the Ghetto, tells a striking story of a Jewish girl. 'A Christian friend of mine, an artist, fell in love with a girl, and courted her regularly at her house for four years. Then he proposed; she told him to ask her father, and he learned *for the first time* that the family was Jewish, and that his suit could not therefore be entertained. Could a satirist have invented anything further? Whatever it was the Jews have to bear witness to, these people had been bearing witness to so effectually that a constant visitor never heard a word of the evidence during four years.' It is to

be feared a similar tale might be told of some Gentiles. For all the witness they bear to their faith in Christ in their conversation, it might be non-existent. How different to the prophet's ideal—'Then they that feared the Lord spake open one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them.'

Thank God it is not always so. There are not a few, sons and husbands, who could tell of times of weariness in the battle of life, when the comforting words of one whose faith in God was as firm as her affection was true, came like a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul.

This is the lesson of Abigail. Out from that distant past with its different atmosphere, different manners, different problems, she comes with a lesson, not for an age but for all time. She tells you what a tactful woman can do. If she could do it, much more can you to whom Christ has revealed a nobler ideal and given the possibility of a grander ministry. Women can minister to Christ by helping men to be better t they would otherwise be, by firmly

suading them from the wrong and counselling them to the right; by encouraging them when cast down; by comforting them when depressed; by pointing them to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me close with the fine words of Ruskin: 'In old times a knight's armour was often buckled on by his lady's hand. That which was only a romantic fashion may enshrine an eternal truth. The soul's armour is often set to its breast by a woman's hand, and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood falls.'

III

THE WOMAN WHO IS ALWAYS 'WANTED'

'All the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.'—Acts ix. 39.

My subject has been suggested to me by a rather striking book I was reading lately, *The Professional Aunt*, by Mrs. George Wemyss. The book has a thread of story running through it, but it is more a character study than a novel. It tells of a woman who was an aunt by 'profession' as well as by blood. Beyond her 'aunthood' she has few or no ties of her own. Her father and mother are dead. She has no sisters; but there are two brothers who are married and have troops of children. Her chief function in life is to be an aunt to them. It is a work she takes very kindly to, for she is fond of 'the bairns.' She loves to give them presents and, what

is less common, she makes a point of carefully suiting her gift to the tastes of each one to whom she makes a present. She knows the time in a boy's life when a 'woolly-haired rabbit' gives place to a 'steam-engine.' Her love triumphs over every difficulty, though these are sometimes great. On one occasion, *e.g.*, she gives her niece a lovely 'cooking-stove.' The child delightedly says: 'I will cook a cake on it to-morrow! And, Auntie, will you eat it?' The professional aunt of course agrees; but next morning, when a black thing closely resembling a mud-pie decorates her breakfast plate, she is hard put to. However, a promise is a promise, and at the risk of death she promptly sends the triumph of culinary art down her throat under the delighted but somewhat anxious scrutiny of its creator. She is an ideal aunt.

One is glad to think that her virtue has in the end its own reward. There is a selfish sister-in-law who seems to think she exists for no other purpose than mothering her children. She discourages marriage in her sister-in-law. 'An unattached female like you, with such a talent for being an aunt,

should wish no other vocation.' But the author cannot bear that such sweetness should waste itself on the desert air of an unwedded life. A lover turns up at the close. They had had 'a misunderstanding' years before; but though many offers had come to her since then, nothing can obliterate the sweetness of that first love, and she lives alone in a little house of her own, faithfully guarded by her old nurse. But the lover returns one day home from India, where he has won many honours. She sees the news of his arrival in the papers and wonders fondly—'Will he come back?' Just then, however, a telegram summons her to the bedside of a niece whom she dearly loves. There for weeks she fights with death, and when she returns to her empty home, it is with the fear that he has forgotten all about her, or called to find her 'not at home.' When she enters, it is to find him inside, waiting for her! On stepping ashore he had sent a telegram announcing that he was coming to see her, and—'Will you meet me?' Had she been at home, her pride might have sent a frigid reply and perhaps frightened him off. But the old

nurse knows better! She takes upon herself to send an answer. And this is it: 'Come at once. Been waiting you for years'! So the wedding-bells ring out at the close.

The story, I dare say, appeals more to aunts than to other folk. There are 'professional aunts' all over the world. God bless them too, for their noble unselfish kindness to the little ones! Our boyhood and girlhood has been gladdened with many an hour of brightness and many a gift of love which has come from their kind hands.

But I do not intend to confine my words this evening to the aunts, 'professional' or otherwise. I take her merely as a starting-point to speak on a character we all know, or at least would like to know—'the woman who is always wanted.' Is not that the picture the Bible gives us in this touching scene? There in front of you lies the white bier enshrining the sweet, unselfish face of this loving woman; the gentle eyes that never looked but with compassion; the tender mouth, now so white and cold, from whose lips there never came but words

of loving cheer. And the hands—the white, thin hands! Ah, so busy were they in life, and now they will clothe the poor of Joppa no more! Well may these widows and orphans stand around the bier and weep. Well may they show the garments their beloved benefactress used to sew in the long hours of night. Dorcas is dead! The woman who was always wanted when she was alive is wanted now more than ever that she is dead!

Now, is not that a lesson for us all? We sometimes see in the papers an advertisement column headed 'Wanted.' And judging from the length of it, there are a good many people who are 'wanted.' And yet the strange and the sad thing is that there are many more who seem 'not wanted.' A Chinese missionary once told me of a family of six girls in China, and when the last one came, the enraged parents gave the poor little thing the name of '*Not-wanted*'! The Western world does not say brutal things like that; but what it does not say it acts, and there are, alas! too many, both men and women,

especially among those who are growing old, who are made to feel that they are 'not wanted.'

Now it is to such that Dorcas speaks her simple but beautiful lesson. She tells us what are the qualities we need to have in order to make us one who is 'always wanted.' What are these? They are mainly two, *a loving Christ-taught heart* and *a skilful generous hand.*

I. Dorcas was in the first place *a woman of a loving heart.* It is said that 'prosperity gains friends but adversity tries them.' It was not so with Dorcas. Adversity was to her the sole passport to friendship. I once knew a minister whose house was called 'the cave of Adullam,' because all that were 'in distress' found their way thither. The house of Dorcas was Joppa's 'cave of Adullam.' Wherever need or sickness, poverty or death, were stretching out pale and piteous hands, there was always one hand ready to grasp them and lift them up. It was the hand of Dorcas. And thus she was 'always wanted.' For as long as the world lasts the cry of human need will

always be heard, 'the still sad music of humanity,' and they who can hear it and answer it will never be out of request. And being in request, they will always be happy. They will never know the dark shadow of *ennui*, for their life will have no vacant places, and in the midst of it all there will ever be upspringing the fountain of the joy of 'the blessed God.' God Himself is 'blessed for ever' because He is the giving God, and His creatures can have no secret of purer and more permanent happiness than this. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Do I speak to any whose lives are fretted with weariness, and lassitude, and ill-health? You go to your doctor, and he recommends Harrogate or Aix-les-Bains or Karlsbad. How would it do to try Joppa instead? The wells there are most beneficial, I can assure you; good for body and soul and mind and heart. Yes; it is the giving life that is in the end the getting life. If you would learn the secret of a truly happy and healthy life, go out in the spirit of Dorcas to minister to the sad and weary all around you.

How was Dorcas led to her life of loving helpfulness? No doubt there was something in her environment that pointed that way. She appears to have been a lonely woman. We read of no father or mother, sister or husband. She appears, too, to have been in easy if not affluent circumstances. She had time to devote her life to something else than her own support. In a self-centred life there are few conditions more certain to spell out misery and ill-health. No need to work! No heart to live! What a plight this for a woman! Yes, and I am afraid there are not a few women in the same plight as that in which Dorcas was, or rather would have been, except for one thing. And what is that? It is the main thing in all her history, the mainspring of all her activities, the keynote of all the beautiful music of her life: she loved the Lord Jesus Christ. 'There was at Joppa a certain *disciple* called Dorcas.' A 'disciple'—note the word, not an apostle, not a prophetess, but just a simple 'disciple'—a learner, a pupil. Yes; but she had learned to some purpose. She had learned the meaning of that new commandment, 'Love one another as I have loved you.'

And she had learned that the newness of that commandment largely depended on this, that you put it into practice. She had learned that a truth becomes altogether different to you when you realise it in action. She had learned that when the Lord loved men, He was not content to say it but to do it; that it meant days of weariness and nights of prayer; that it meant healing the sick and feeding the hungry and saving the lost; that it meant Capernaum's streets and Samaria's well and Calvary's cross. And so the new commandment, 'as I have loved you,' became new to her and new to Joppa, when men saw through their dark streets this angel of mercy going from house to house, with a smile on her face and—*a parcel in her hand!* This practical love of Christ, how much the world wants it! Are there any to whom these words may come who are in the position of Dorcas? Do you live alone? Is the need of providing for your daily bread and clothing not enough to absorb all your time? Then Dorcas calls on you and says—'Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ.' For mine is the blessed life, and the world is crying out for

workers still, crying with a far more bitter wail than ever came from that little city by the sea, crying from the vast and unwieldy masses of our modern civilisation.

As Ruskin says in his own eloquent way, there are 'flowers that could bless you for having blessed them, and will love you for having loved them. Far among the moorlands and the rocks—far in the darkness of the terrible streets—these feeble florets are lying with all their fresh leaves torn and their stems broken; will you never go down to them nor set them in order in their little fragrant beds, nor fence them in their trembling from the fierce wind?'

'O hearts are bruised and dead,
And homes are bare and cold,
And lambs for whom the Shepherd bled
Are straying from the fold.

To comfort and to bless,
To find a balm for woe,
To tend the lone and fatherless,
Is angels' work below.'

'And all the widows stood by—weeping.'

II. 'And showing *the coats and garments which Dorcas made,* while she was with them.' There was another reason why

Dorcas was a woman that was 'always wanted.' She had not merely the priceless gift of a loving heart, she had also a *skilful and, above all, an enterprising hand.*

I remember once reading a fresh and interesting essay by Sir W. Robertson Nicoll on this word 'wanted.' And one of the things he said was this: 'What is wanted to-day is men of initiative, men who can strike out a new idea, and, what is harder, realise it.' That is a true word. It is hard. It needs indeed not a little courage to initiate. You will have to face a good deal of criticism. You may be accused of sensationalism, eccentricity, self-advertisement, and all the other dismal spectres of conventionalism whereby deadly dulness tries to entrench itself against all that is fresh and interesting, but if you can face these boldly, you will find that your courage will have a big reward. You will find that behind the critics there is a big world crying out for you and saying, 'Come on! Do not be afraid. You are the man, you are the woman we want.'

Now it was just this Dorcas did. Looking into the satchel of her possibilities she saw

that she had not many talents there. She was not what the world would call a gifted woman. She could not 'prophesy' like the daughters of Philip. She could not work miracles like Peter. She had not the rare poetic soul of the author of 'the Magnificat.' No; but there was one gift lying there that she might use for the Master. She could sew. She had a skilful hand. And this she determined to use for God. So she resolved to strike out a new line for herself and become the needlewoman of Joppa. In the meeting, while the others were preaching and praying, Dorcas would be silent; but when the meeting was over you would have seen her in her little home busy late and early, working there coats and garments by which she clothed the widows and orphans of Joppa. And thus, without knowing it, she became a kind of pioneer in Christian work, and made herself famous in the Church as the founder of 'Dorcas societies.' For before that, while men had willingly given money and food for Christ's poor, it had never struck them to use the needle in the service of the Master; but now the Church awakened to see what

a mighty instrument had been put into her hands when woman could use the needle in her service.

The needle! How much has it done for the Church! Schiller has sung the song of 'the Bell'; Whitman has sung the song of 'the Axe'; Jasher has sung the song of 'the Bow'; but where is the song of 'the Needle'? Hood has indeed his own memorable verses upon it; but his is a dirge, not a song, giving a side of its work which is, alas! too true, its power to pierce the heart of the poor sweated seamstress or dressmaker. But to-night I would rather sing '*the song of the needle*'; what wonders it has wrought in the hands of loving women; what garments it has made to clothe the hungry; what churches it has built; what missions it has equipped; what interest it has engendered in many a woman's society. And it all came from Dorcas! She, the ungifted needlewoman of Joppa, was the pioneer in that work which has been one of the mightiest aids of the Christian Church.

Now the lesson of all this is not confined to women. We can all be pioneers: we can all gain that priceless gift of initiative

which experience tells us so truly is a thing that is always 'wanted.' And we can be so by 'loving much.' Initiative is the child of love. Love will always find out the way. If the way be impossible by the ordinary track, it will strike out a new one of its own. It will always find a way through. If *this* door to usefulness is shut, it will ask—'Can I not enter by *that* one?' And so it will conduct the soul by what seems a side door into what turns out the best thing in our life. Out of our weakness we become strong. Out of our limitations we rise into the rank of Christian pioneers.

Such a life can never die. It may seem to die, but its deeds live on. When Dorcas died, it was felt by the whole of Joppa she had died too soon. They must have her back! And so Peter was sent for. He came, no doubt, only to sympathise. But no sooner did he arrive than he found himself in an atmosphere of earnest, believing prayer; and so it was revealed to him that it was here, at Joppa, the greatest miracle of his life was to be performed. He knelt by the bed. He looked into the sweet dead

face. He lifted up his heart to God in a great petition—'Lord, give us this life we so much want back again'; and then, gently and softly, yet knowing that the Holy Spirit was breathing in the words, he said, 'Tabitha, arise!' The closed eyelids open, the eyes look out on life again; and when they catch sight of Peter, the great apostle and pillar of the Church, she instinctively rises up to greet and do honour to one she doubtless knew in other days as the great friend and follower of her blessed Lord. So she came back to her old work again; doubtless, at first, with a little regret. She had been well content 'to depart and be with Christ, which is far better'; but soon the needs and sorrows of Joppa would absorb her loving heart once more, and for a little longer she tarried with them, to be the ministering angel of the Christian community there.

Yet, after all, her true resurrection came later, when her example moved women all over the Church to take up the needle as it fell finally from her fingers, and follow in the path which has brought so much help to the poor and needy in every land.

Would you be a woman like her? Would you be one who is always 'wanted'? Then imitate her loving heart and unwearied hand. 'What is that in thine hand?' said God to Moses. 'Only a rod,' replied his craven heart, a poor shepherd's crook; but as he cast it from him, it became a hissing serpent full of deadly intent. It is a picture of the doom of the misused talent. Neglected, cast away, it becomes an angry serpent ready to sting us with remorseful pain. 'Grasp it now in thine hand,' said God, and lo! in Moses' hand it became a rod of power whereby he did mighty deeds.

What is that in *thine* hand? 'Only a needle, Lord, a poor seamstress's needle. What can I do with such a feeble thing as that?' Use it for self, and it will become a serpent that will poison your life and pierce your heart; but wield it for God, and under His grace it may be transformed into an instrument of untold good to others, and untellable blessings to yourself.

IV

THE WOMAN WHO NEVER FALTERS IN HER TASK OF HAPPINESS

'Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, it is well.'—2 KINGS iv. 26.

I HAVE taken our title to-night from the well-known lines of Stevenson:

'If I have faltered more or less
In my great task of happiness,
If I have moved among my race
And shown no glorious morning face,
If beams from happy human eyes
Have moved me not, if morning skies,
Books, and my food and summer rain
Knocked on my sullen heart in vain;—
Lord, Thy most pointed pleasure take
And stab my spirit broad awake.'

The lines are noble, but the life of him who lived them was still more so. Though weak in body all his days, scouring the world in search of a healthy lung, Stevenson

never faltered in his 'great task of happiness.' His works are full of the most cheerful optimism. It is said that on one occasion a critic complained that their great defect was 'a lack of the touch of pain.' 'This writer,' he said, 'has evidently never truly known what suffering is, or he would not speak so complacently about its endurance.' Stevenson said it was the best compliment he ever received; and well he might.

There are not a few men like Stevenson in this. Dickens has drawn one in his immortal Mark Tapley, the man who grew sad when his misfortunes ended, because his occupation was gone. But on the whole I think woman has even a nobler record in this respect. How many bright, cheerful, uncomplaining Mrs. Wiggses there are, who fight their brave fight on 'cabbage patches' all around us! I like her fine cheery prayer in the Sunday-school in her little room: 'Lord, help these children to be good and kind to each other. Make them thankful for whatever they've got, even if it ain't but a little. Show us all how to live as You want us to live, an' praise God from Whom all blessings flow. Amen.'

This is the kind of woman of which the woman of Shunem is the great 'Bible type,' and a very noble representative she is. She is called a 'great woman.' And whatever that phrase may mean, there was certainly a moral and spiritual greatness about her that made her well worthy of the name in its highest and largest sense.

She comes before us in three different scenes, and of these there shine out qualities of character which make up in their combination the very perfection of the woman 'who never falters in the great task of happiness.'

I. In her first appearance on the stage of history we notice a spirit of *perceptive helpfulness* which is one of the marks and secrets of the cheerful spirit. For when the prophet Elisha passes by her house on his pastoral rounds, she notices one thing about him that seems never to have struck her neighbours. They noticed him, but it was only to admire or criticise. 'Look,' they said, 'here comes Elisha the prophet. A good man, no doubt; but for my part I don't think he is to be compared

to his predecessor. Would we had Elijah back again!' 'To equal your predecessor,' some one says, 'you must have double his worth'; and I dare say Elisha had to face a good deal of that kind of criticism.

But this Shunammite noticed none of these things; or if she did, she never spoke of them. She only noticed his good points. 'I perceive this is an *holy* man of God which passeth by us continually.' She notices too that this holy man is often a little *weary*, that his step is not so light as it ought to be, and this perception shapes itself into a gracious thought. 'Let us make a little chamber on the wall that the man of God may go in there and rest. We won't trouble him with our conversation. He has enough of that. Let us give him rest and quiet.' A most considerate act; for as one has said, 'to show kindness to a great man and demand in return his society is a good bargain; but to show such kindness and expect nothing is an act of grace which leaves a considerable debt on the side of the beneficiary.'[1] It is true considerateness.

All perceptiveness is a gift. Sherlock

[1] Dr. Horton.

Holmes has taught us in a hundred fascinating tales how one man may *see* what others see, but *perceives* — infinitely more. Nor is it a gift in which women fail. Their comparative defencelessness as compared to man, their openness to attack, has developed the quality of observation in a degree to which he seldom attains. They usually notice all that 'passes by them *continually*.' They can tell about almost everything that takes place in their neighbourhood. They know whether that is a new hat which So-and-so has got on. They know the marriages that are likely to take place round about them long before they occur—sometimes even before the people who are thus 'married' know it themselves!

It is a useful gift within limits. But it is not necessarily a moral gift. It may even be something very different. It may lead to an undue inquisitiveness into one's neighbour's concerns which is decidedly irritating. A detective is all very well at Scotland Yard, but we do not want one next door. Never spy on your neighbours 'behind the blinds.' Leave their privacies undisturbed and mind your own business.

There is, however, a perceptiveness which is very different. I have called it *perceptive helpfulness*. It is the quality of seeing *when* a man is needing help, and of knowing *how* to help him. I remember, when I was a student, committing a *faux pas* before my class which covered me with ridicule. Young men are often as sensitive as the antennæ of a crustacean, and I slunk home that day as if I had committed a capital offence. Next morning I dreaded going back, and sure enough, on my first appearance, a man began with a great guffaw to refer to the incident. But another man stopped him. 'Shut up, man,' he said, 'you 've often done far worse'; and he changed the subject. I said nothing, but I felt keenly grateful, and have never forgotten the man since. It was a disclosure to me of the value of that quality which plays such a gracious part in some lives—the power of perceptive helpfulness, the noticing of what is needed to help a man when he is down.

There is a beautiful illustration of that in Christ's life, when the woman who was a sinner anointed His feet. 'When the Pharisee saw it he said, This man if he were

a prophet would have *perceived* who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, for she is a sinner.' Ah! Christ had *perceived* that long ago; but He had also *perceived* what the Pharisee had been blind to, that though a sinner, she was a contrite sinner, and that this was an offering of penitence which had in it the promise of life.

Brethren, cultivate this spirit of *perceptive helpfulness*. Cultivate it for your own sake, for there is nothing which will make you happy more than helping others. So Mrs. Wiggs found, and so you will find. But cultivate it still more for the sake of others. Look out for the weary men and women who pass your windows. Build for them a little chamber on the wall. You may find it by and by the place where God will meet you with the greatest blessing in your life.

II. Once more we notice in this 'great woman of Shunem' *a spirit of beautiful contentment with her lot in life.*

For when the prophet, full of gratitude for the kindly thought, wishes to show her some return for the gracious act, and offers

to use his influence for the promotion of her husband to some high office in the state, she replies with as much wisdom as grace—'I dwell among mine own people.'

Many a woman like her, we know, would have jumped at such an offer. No more farm drudgery. No cows to milk; no hens to feed; no rough farm-hands to associate with. No; to be a fine lady in Samaria's fashionable streets! to rustle her silks among the great and cultured of the land! How many a woman's head would have been turned by a prospect like that; not to speak of the love of seeing her husband get on in the world.

But this woman was wiser. She had a true perception of where the sources of real happiness lay. 'I dwell among mine own people.' She realised how much environment counts in the 'Vol. II.' of human life. In 'Vol. I.' we can adapt ourselves to anything. In 'Vol. II.' things must adapt themselves to us or—we are undone.

'I should only be a fish out of water,' she said to herself, 'in that fine society. As for my husband, instead of getting on, he would be leaving the only work he was

fit for and become spoiled by the gay officers and courtiers of the palace. No, let us live the simple life in Shunem's lovely valley, and serve God in the place where He has put us.' 'I dwell among mine own people.'

'Content to fill a little place, if Thou be glorified.' That is a great secret of happiness. Truly 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.' It is the quickest way to fortune I know. To live in the present; to enjoy its gifts to the full; not 'to look before and after, and sigh for what is not,' but to see the wealth of beauty that is lying for us in that prosaic '*now*' of our daily life —this is a great gain.

Amiel, the melancholy dreamer of the Alps, says in his diary somewhere, 'I have the imagination of *regret*, not of hope.' I see the glory in the past, but I see no brightness gilding the future. That is the saddest of all conditions, and yet it is too common. There are others, who see only a glory in the distant future. They are ever grasping after a 'rainbow gold' that lies in the distant horizon of their hopes.

How much better the spirit of content

with the present, 'I dwell among mine own people.' That does not mean no ambition, but the quiet spirit of trust in God that Paul had when he said, 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content.' *Learned*—where? In the school of Gamaliel? No; there was no class of contentment in that college. It was in the school of Another that Paul graduated Master of all the Arts. 'I can do all things through Christ.'

And though she had never heard of Christ's name, it was practically the same Teacher who graduated this woman of Shunem. The eternal Christ visits many souls that never knew Him by name. For it was, as we see later, an implicit faith in the love and lead of God that was the secret of this woman's quiet heart. She dwelt happy among her own people, because she dwelt in God. Sunrises on Shunem's hills were always fair for her, because the sunshine of the love of God was always breaking on the dark hills of time. Sunsets were always quiet with a sweet content for her, because, as their evening shadows crept along by Carmel's distant heights,

they spoke to her of the 'Shadow of His Wings' under which she had come to trust.

'I dwell among mine own people,' said the wise Shunammite. 'They are good enough for me. I want no more. I love my husband. He is better to me than seven sons. I am content with him.'

III. Nevertheless, when a son did come, we may be sure her heart was glad. What woman would be otherwise? And so we come to the last and greatest scene in this woman's life, the *hour when in the darkest and saddest of earth's experiences she was able to say, 'It is well.'*

Some years have passed since we saw her. Her child is a child no longer. He is a boy now with a man's heart, and eager to be off with his father to the reapers. She has seen him go out that morning, watched perhaps his sweet smile as he turned at the gate and waved his hand in a gleeful farewell, and went off with his big father of whom he was so proud, to hear the swish of the long scythe, and see the tall and bearded corn fall into the women's arms, and be stacked

in 'stooks,' like little huts all over the harvest field. But

'There is a Reaper whose name is death,'

and sometimes with his scythe he cuts down not only the tall and bearded grain but the flowers that grow between. And this was seemingly one of *his* days; for it is but six hours since the boy left the house as merry as a young pony and as strong, and now he is lying there in the prophet's chamber still and pallid in death—a rosebud withered by the sun! The gift that she had not sought is taken from her, now when she had learned to love it with all a mother's heart. It was hard, cruelly hard; one of these dark lines in the spectrum of the light of God's love which we shall never fully explain here. Yet even then, I want you to notice, her faith did not falter in its 'great task.' For what are the beautiful words she gives utterance to, when the prophet, seeing her wildly driving across the hills, sends Gehazi to ask if all is well? They are words of unfaltering faith. 'Is it well with thyself? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?'

Notice the skilful climax—not the climax of art but of heart—unstudied but true. First herself—the least—then her husband, and then her idol, her child. And *he* is lying dead; but she only answered—'*It is well.*'

That is the true climax of the story. The old chronicler goes on to tell how for her this faith was justified—her child was given back to her alive. But for us the truest and best word is this, that even when her child was dead, when her darling was taken from her, she was yet able to say, 'It is well.'

For that is the great lesson this woman has to teach you and me, the beatitude of unfaltering faith. We have not an Elisha to come over the dark hills of our sorrows and restore to us our dead. When we lay them with heart-breaking anguish in the little chamber where we once kissed them when asleep, and now kiss with an eternal farewell the white, sweet face, we know there shall be no return in this life. There is no one to come and 'awake' the sleeping one for us. No; but we have One who says to us, 'Weep not. I am the Resur-

rection and the Life. He that believeth in Me shall never die.' We have One to whisper to us, 'In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I have only taken him away a little sooner to prepare you for the place.'

I remember an old Highland woman whose husband was carried in from the railway with both legs cut away. When there was little hope he would ever recover, I went to comfort her, but found her perfectly calm. 'I take comfort,' she said to me, 'in thinking that this cup was prepared for me by a Father's hand *from the foundation of the world*.' That is the strong side of Calvinism. 'Whom He did foreknow, He did predestinate to be confirmed to the image of His Son.' Therefore 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' This was the secret of the woman of Shunem. It may surely be ours also, to whom God has spoken in Jesus Christ with a more sure word of prophecy. 'He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up to die for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' Standing in the sun-

light of the Cross, all earthly shadows may well take wings for an eternal flight. Beneath that radiance we may surely be able to say —'It is well.'

'Ours is such a full salvation,
All must be well.
Happy still in God confiding,
Fruitful if in Christ abiding,
Holy through the Spirit's guiding:
All, all is well.'

V

THE WOMAN WITH THE BROKEN HEART

'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?'—Prov. xviii. 14.

In my favourite among the romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne there is a striking picture of the wounded heart. It is that tragic moment in which the author depicts the death of Zenobia. That great but erring woman had come to an end such as Shakespeare describes for poor Ophelia. And when her lifeless body was at length dragged out of the deep pool in which it was found, it was Hollingsworth, the noble yet hard-hearted philanthropist, the man who unconsciously had sent her to her doom, and whom she had fruitlessly loved—it was Hollingsworth who had the misery of discovering the poor lifeless body. He had done so with a long, hooked pole which he had plunged into the river, and with which

he had unwittingly struck her in the breast. When the body was dragged to the shore and Foster, a rough farmer, was bending over it, he noticed the wound. 'You have wounded the poor thing's breast,' he said, 'and close beside the heart too.' 'Ha!' cried Hollingsworth with a start. 'And so he had,' comments the writer, 'both before and after death!'

There are many like poor Zenobia in that! They live and die with a wound—'close beside the heart'—and it is of that large constituency our text speaks when it says: 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit, who can bear?'

It might seem from our text as if there was a distinction here suggested between men and women—that a man's strong spirit can sustain his infirmities, while a woman's softer soul yields before them. But I do not think that is the meaning of the writer. He is using the word 'man' in the broad general sense of men and women, and he is pointing out that while some bravely 'take arms against a sea of troubles,' others sink under them and are submerged in the tide of misfortune. And this we know is true.

There is nothing more striking than the difference which misfortune makes on character. As fire melts wax but hardens clay, so some become stronger and grander under affliction, while others faint sadly under its burden, and disappoint the promise of their youth. It is of them that Ruskin speaks when he says, 'I do not wonder at what people suffer, but I wonder at what they lose.'

What are the things that lead to the wounded spirit? *Sin* is one of these. It has a cruel power to wound the heart. You remember how Peter was wounded in heart when the Lord looked on him in the judgment-hall as he cursed and swore, and 'he went out and wept bitterly.' Oh what a wound that must have been to Peter's soul when next day he reflected that that was the last earthly look Jesus had ever had of Peter! Cursing and denying Him! What would he not have given to have these moments back that he might be a different man. But it might not be. The irrevocable past had gone, leaving with it a bitter wound 'close beside the heart.'

And there is many a man like Peter in this. Would that some of us might learn ere it is too late that sin leaves its wound, and that the deeds we do so unthinkingly in youth may speak to us in bitter accents in later years.

Or the wound may be due to *unrequited affection*. I remember once officiating at the funeral of a woman whom I verily believe died of a broken heart. She had two sons. One a fine, noble boy, died early of consumption in a foreign land. That was a sore wound in that mother's heart; but the other still was left. Alas! he did not turn out well. He was careless, unloving, and finally left her. Then she turned her face to the wall and died. The battle was too sore. The deadly wound would not heal. As I looked at that son at the funeral, I saw he was dumb with grief; and well might he be so. As Browning has put it,

'You trod upon a heart.'

And such things are happening all around us. We say, 'No one dies of a broken heart except in novels. Time heals all wounds. We soon get over it, and smile at the foolish

tears we shed.' And no doubt there is a false sentiment in many third-rate romances which is most enervating to the soul. There is call for courage here, and the strong soul should never faint under any misfortune, but say, in the words of the great Danton when on the way to the scaffold he saw his young wife weeping, and was almost unmanned, 'Danton! no weakness.'

But we are not all Dantons, and it is to be feared that more lives are spoiled by 'the wounded heart' than men dream of. Certainly, if literature is the mirror of life, this is a fatal wound to many. Shakespeare especially has carried the pageant of a bleeding heart through many a noble tragedy, and in splendid verse has often illustrated the truth of the wise man's aphorism, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?'

So that brings us to the great practical question suggested by our text, *How shall we wisely and nobly sustain our infirmities? What is the best medicine for the wounded spirit?*

Perhaps the best way to answer that

question is to begin by doing so *negatively*. We may be most easily conducted into the path of endurance and courage by observing the false ways to peace which others take. The Bible itself gives us some striking examples of these. One is the picture of a woman, or the *soft* way of yielding to misfortune; the other is that of a man, or the *hard* way of coarsening under it.

The first is Naomi. She bears, or rather does not bear, 'the wounded spirit' by becoming querulous and complaining under it. See her as she returns to Bethlehem, after her ten years' sojourn in the land of Moab. She has gone out from that town a happy, contented mother. How does she return? She returns in such a way that her friends do not know her. All the town was moved as she went up the old street, and said, 'Is this Naomi? Can this be the same woman as left us a bright, cheerful mother, and now—what is she? A poor old broken-down creature. Surely it cannot be the same woman!' And they were right. 'Call me not Naomi,' she peevishly cries out. 'Call me Marah, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went

out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. Why then call ye me Naomi?' Yes, indeed, she is entirely changed. Misfortune has transformed the bright girl into a peevish, complaining woman.

And this, alas! is the result of the wounded spirit with many. It is perhaps more common among women, though it is not unknown among men—the gently complaining spirit which makes life a perpetual burden to itself, and to all who are unfortunate enough to live in its company. George Eliot has drawn the picture of it to the very life in Lisbeth Bede, the mother of Adam Bede. 'Lisbeth,' she says, 'sat down alone to cry over her knitting. Women who are never bitter and resentful are often the most querulous; and if Solomon was as wise as he is reputed to be, I feel sure that when he compared a contentious woman to a continual dropping on a very rainy day, he had not a vixen in his eye—a fury with long nails, acrid and selfish. Depend upon it, he meant a good creature, with no joy but in the happiness of the loved ones whom she contributed to make uncomfortable;

putting by all the tit-bits for them and spending nothing on herself. Such a woman as Lisbeth—at once patient and complaining, self-renouncing and exacting, brooding the livelong day over what happened yesterday, and what is likely to happen to-morrow.'

However gentle and well-disposed such people may be, they unconsciously do an immense amount of evil in the world. They lower the temperature of every society they enter. They spoil home life, and among the working-classes do much to fill the public-house, and they end by spoiling their own life, and changing their name from Naomi into Marah. My brother, my sister, fight against the complaining spirit! Fight it like the very devil, for indeed it is the devil —the demon of discontent.

The other type of the wounded spirit in the Old Testament is Saul—the spirit that is wounded by sin and its accompaniment, divine rejection. There we see how a spirit wounded may sometimes become hard and sullen and revengeful. Saul had many noble qualities at the beginning of his life. He was modest, courageous, chivalrous. But things went against him, as they some-

times do in the afternoon of life. And then the spirit of the devil entered into him, 'and he became another man.' He grew sour, jealous, revengeful, until at last he perished miserably on Mount Gilboa. 'The sorrow of the world' in him 'worked death.'

And so is it with many a man and many a woman still. Sorrow does not break them; but it hardens them. They become bitter at 'gods and men.' 'What little faith I had,' wrote one of these to a friend of mine, 'has been entirely taken away.' The wound on the heart has become a wound on the conscience as well, and this is the most fatal wound of all. If they are men, they plunge into dissipation or money-getting, and become either misers or profligates. If women, they become cold, bitter, revengeful in spirit, and wreak their vengeance on any one in their power. These unnatural stories of women's cruelty to helpless children are doubtless to be traced to an experience like this. The sorrow of the world has worked in them the death of the soul. And what a death that is! There are tragedies in the soul as terrible, though never seen, as that which was witnessed on

the evening of that gloomy day on Mount Gilboa.

But the mention of this last type of the wounded spirit conducts us to the true secret of how to bear it wisely and courageously, so that it will become to us not merely no destroyer of our life, but, on the contrary, a regenerator and ennobler of it. For as we look at the character of Saul, we see that the one great thing he lacked was true religion. As Professor A. B. Davidson has well said, 'He was not quite an irreligious man; but religion was not able to make much of him. He had general notions of what religion demanded, but he could not realise it in its depth. Even the common people remarked it. Hence they thought it even amusing when Saul was seen in the company of the prophets; and it gave rise to a popular proverb at his expense, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" This was how the feeling about Saul showed itself among those who observed things in a kindly way; but perhaps the same feeling came to light among other elements of the populace in that scornful demand regarding the

new king, made by some whom the author in his anger names Sons of Belial: "How shall this man save us?" "And they despised him."'

It is this deep religous faith, and this only, that will enable our spirits successfully to sustain the inevitable misfortunes of later life. And it will do so by suggesting to us the two great panaceas for 'the wounded spirit.'

One of these is *the spirit of prayer—earnest, believing prayer.* This is the great remedy for the wounded spirit suggested by the book of Psalms. 'When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.' 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Return unto thy rest, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.' How often do these old Psalms begin in the minor and end in the major key! When the soul came first into the presence of its God, it could only wail out the tale of pain and anguish; but ere it was long there, the healing of God flowed into it, like a river in a dry place, and he who came to weep, remained to praise.

And if the saints in the old economy could do this, how much more may we who have a great high Priest to lead us boldly to 'the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' But it is here we need to have first had a deep knowledge of God as He is revealed in Christ. Without this we are apt to be driven away from the anchorage of faith, and hope and prayer become no longer possible for us.

And then the second remedy for the aching heart is *work—a loving and active interest in the things of others.* I think it was Bishop Wilberforce who was once asked the best cure for sorrow, and he replied—'Go and try to make others happy.' And that is true. We see a striking illustration of it in the contrast of Ruth and Naomi. Ruth too had her heartache. Perhaps the poet was right when he paints her as 'she stood *in tears* amid the alien corn'; but if so, she did not allow her griefs to absorb her. She thought of her poor, broken-hearted mother-in-law. She went out with a resolute heart to work for her, and forgot herself, and so she was the means not merely of comforting

her own widowed soul, but of bringing back the light to poor Naomi's eyes, as she looked into the face of Ruth's little baby and saw in it a pledge that her life was not in vain. So, if we would live more for others and think less of ourselves and our sorrows, we would find our troubles take wings and fly away.

An Alpine climber tells how once, when lost in the snowy mountains, he felt the deathly torpor creeping over him which ends in the sleep from which there is no awaking. Suddenly the guide with whom he was travelling sank down in the snow and said, 'Leave me to die. Save yourself.' But instead of doing so, he hastened to his side, shook him up, rubbed his limbs, and supported him down the icy slope. In doing so his own torpor disappeared. The excitement of saving a fellow-being from death saved himself.

If we would only think of our wounded brothers more, our own wounds would heal more quickly. If we would take large views of life and throw ourselves into the service of God and humanity, at home and abroad; if we would do some bit of work

in the Church of Christ, and not plead in answer to every call of the Master, 'I have no time, I have no talents, I have no money,' we should find that a new joy would fill our lives—the joy of saving others. For

'The quality of mercy is not strained.
. . . It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.'

But to do this successfully we must first bring our wounded heart to Him whose heart was once broken for us, praying that He would take and heal that which we had not given when it needed no healing. He will not turn away from that prayer. He will not despise the broken heart. And thus what seemed the darkest experience in our life may turn out the brightest and the best. As Miss Rossetti puts it:

'Lord, when my heart was whole, I kept it back,
And grudged to give it Thee.
Now then that it is broken, must I lack
Thy kind word, "Give it Me."

Silence would be but just, and Thou art just;
Yet since I lie here shattered in the dust,
With still an eye to lift to Thee,
A broken heart to give;
I think that Thou wilt bid me live,
And answer, "Give it Me."'

VI

THE WOMAN OF PUBLIC SPIRIT

'I Deborah arose . . . a mother in Israel.'—JUDGES v. 7.

DEBORAH'S song is pronounced by the critics 'the oldest writing in the Bible.' They do not deny that parts of the Pentateuch are inspired by earlier documents; but they hold that these have been rewritten. Their Hebrew is more modern. The song of Deborah comes unaltered from the age that gave it birth. It is a veritable cry from the womb of the past.

However true that may be, there can be no doubt that Deborah's song is a very ancient piece of literature. One feels that in reading it. Its rugged elliptic form, its passionate patriotism, its 'hate of hate and scorn of scorn,' all stamp it with the impress of an age when the elemental forces of human nature were unchecked by the softening touch of civilisation.

And it is as beautiful as it is old. A glorious fire runs through its verses, like the lightning on a storm-cloud. It flashes like a gleaming sword in battle. Even its sternest passages move to admiration. It is a glory to womanhood that the literature of the Bible should have for its beginning the splendid song of Deborah.

But for us, perhaps the most striking thing about this ode is, that it brings before us *the first public woman of the Bible, if not of history.* This is an age in which woman is claiming her rights with an insistence before unknown. We hear of the 'new woman' on every hand. There is the university woman, the medical woman, the woman who has an ambition to be on public boards, the temperance advocate, the political woman, with her noisy sub-species 'the suffragette.' I am not going to speak of these various types of the public woman to-night. I only mention them to point out to you that Deborah was a 'new woman' in an age that is very old. There is nothing new under the sun. There were 'new women' at the dawn of civilisation, and there will, I hope, be 'old women' at the

close of it. Both are needed. Each has her virtues and defects, and it is in illustration of these I take up this character to-night—Deborah the gifted, the heroic, 'the public woman of the Bible.'

I. What then do we note first of all about Deborah? This significant fact, that *though Deborah was a public woman, she was not a private failure.*

Her success in public life was not built on the ruins of home life. She was not conspicuous for the dirt and unpunctuality of her household, and the general misery and sheepishness of her husband and children.

You say, how do you know that? I know it, I reply, from our text. 'I arose *a mother* in Israel.' Do you think Deborah would have said that had she been a failure at home? 'No, you all know me,' she said. 'I am no eccentricity, no wild sibyl of the woods, though a prophetess. I am just a plain domestic woman like yourselves. I arose, a mother in Israel.'

That too I think is evident, from the fact that she was known as a counsellor long before she became a warrior. The place

where she used to sit and give advice was so famous that it was pointed out for centuries. It was an oak-tree, under whose shadow she would 'rest' when her day's work was done, and give counsel to weary men suffering under the burdens of life. Yes, as Dr. Matheson has well said, she began her public work as a parish sister, a woman with a big heart, a wise mind, and a clear judgment.

Would this have happened if she had been a slattern at home, neglectful of husband and children, untidy in her dress, and thriftless in her domestic economy? I am sure Deborah's children were the best cared for, and Deborah's husband the best set up in Mount Ephraim. I am sure Deborah's hat, if she wore one, would be the neatest and most becoming in Palestine. A woman who wrote such poetry could not be other than a woman of taste. It was no unseemly boast when she said, 'I arose a mother in Israel.'

Do not suppose, then, that because God has called you to be a mother *of* Israel, you have a right to neglect your duties as a mother *in* Israel. There is an idea half-conscious in the Roman Catholic Church,

that a woman can only serve Christ in the highest service *outside* of the home, and therefore no sooner does she receive a 'vocation' than it is regarded as a call to 'forsake all for Christ.' And there is an idea, more than half-conscious, in the Reformed Church, that if a woman is doing public duties, it is an atonement for comparative neglect of her husband and children at home. Both are heresies. Home is the woman's highest sphere, and nothing can atone for her neglect of it. The platform can never make up for the neglected fireside. The cloister should never encroach on the hearth.

II. But note, second, that though Deborah was 'a mother in Israel,' *she did not content herself with being a mere mother there: she 'arose a mother in Israel.'*

We speak of 'mere' man. What about 'mere' woman? What about these women who never rise above the thought of sex? There is a domesticity which is as selfish as it is narrowing. I have known girls whom marriage glorified. I have known others whom it dwarfed. None so useful

in the church before the wedding-bells rang. None so useless afterwards! Their souls shrivelled up to a baby's pinafore!

There was nothing of that in Deborah. She had that glorious gift in a woman, a soul that grows bigger as it grows older. Every year she was taking broader outlooks on men and things. Every year she was feeding her mind on the great literature of her country, its songs, and prophetic words, and sacred laws. As the years went on her heart grew fresher, richer, larger, until at last men awoke to find that this was a very prophetess of God in their midst.

One thing deeply stirred her soul, the misery of the homes of her native land. One name could make this loving woman blaze up in a fire of indignation. It was Sisera! No Armenian ever quivered at the name of 'Abdul the damned' as Deborah did at that name; for from her windows she had seen, far off on lonely hill or quiet valley, the smoke of burning cottages. And she knew what that meant. Cruel, unprovoked murder! The ravishment of women! The slavery of children! The nameless fate of maidens! Yes; and per-

haps when night fell, she would sometimes steal out of her fortified city and make her solitary way to one of these homes, and as she beheld the sad sight, the blackened walls, the stark, cold, blood-stained face of the father, the corpse of wife or son lying at his side, the ruins of the roofless kitchen that but yesternight had been a happy home, her heart would swell and she would say,

> '"The children born of thee are fire and sword,
> Red ruin and the breaking up of *homes*[1]!"

But the day is coming, Sisera, when thou shalt pay for this to the God of Israel; and be mine the hand to bring thee to judgment!' She *arose* a mother in Israel.

Now is there not a call on some of you to arise as Deborah did? There are ruined homes around you to-day, just as there were in Israel's land long ago. Among the many funerals I have attended, one stands out in my memory with a pathos all its own, because it was the funeral of a *home* as well as of a person. That home, as I knew it first, was very bright and happy. A husband, a happy, loving wife, three girls and

[1] I have taken the liberty of changing Tennyson's word 'laws' into 'homes.'

one darling boy. But one dark night the husband was taken home from the railway a mangled corpse. For a year the widow bravely struggled on. But her heart was broken. She fell into decline. The funeral day had come. When it was over, the children were to part. The two youngest were to go to an institution. One was going to a relative, another to a friend. It was the funeral of a *home* as well as of a *mother*! I shall never forget that funeral-chamber. Above the fireplace was a neat little text, and on it the words, 'Home, sweet home!' In front, on the table, lay the coffin with its unresponsive face. In the corner the four little children breaking the silence with their sobs. I thought of that mother in the bridal dawn of her wedded life hanging up that text there with fond assurance. 'Home, *sweet* home!' Yes, it had been so while it lasted; but it would be so no more. This was the funeral of a home.

That was a home broken up by sorrow, and there was a mystery of pain in it that made it hard to say 'Thy will be done!' But what of the homes broken up by sin? For one broken by sorrow there are

hundreds broken by sin. Lust and strong drink, the oppression of the sweating-den—these are Sisera's bands to-day, and they are slaying their thousands and tens of thousands all over our pleasant land. What are we doing for these ruined homes? Is it not time for some of us to arise as Deborah did, and join the noble band of men and women of public spirit—men and women whom the misery of the world will not suffer to rest until they have struck a blow for God and humanity? Is not Christ calling you, my sisters, to this? Yes, surely the same voice that called to the women of Jerusalem calls to you to-day—'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and *for your children*.' Weep for the sorrows and the sins of your sisters. Rise up from your cushions of ease and selfish indifference, and go forth into 'the sorrowful way' to help Christ by helping your fellow men and women.

III. Once more, note about Deborah that *her call to public service did not place her in antagonism to men.*

'Then sung Deborah *and Barak*.' The

song was really Deborah's, but she did not sing it alone. She sang it as a duet. Life's song is always best sung in duet. To solo the music leads usually to flatness on the man's part and screechiness on the woman's. Deborah had no temptation that way. She was no Cleopatra emulous of man's position. Her part was to enlist the men, work through the men, enthuse the men; and in this she nobly succeeded.

In Barak she had a somewhat feeble instrument; though perhaps his timidity has been overstated. Certainly he had a wise perception of the greatness of Deborah. 'I will go,' he said, 'if you come with me; but not otherwise.' In this he was right. It was when, like Joan of Arc, she placed herself at the head of the army, that the thousands flocked to her standard. Men's souls were thrilled to their depths when they saw this noble woman going out 'on her white palfrey' to save Israel. A flood of patriotism swelled, with one or two exceptions, over every part of the country, and in a few weeks Sisera and all his chariots were swept into 'that ancient river, the river of Kishon.'

There is surely a lesson here for all women in public life. Never antagonise your brothers. You will get nothing by opposing men that you will not far sooner and better get by conciliating them. Personally, I think the time must come when the full enfranchisement of womanhood will be accepted as an axiom of every Christian state. That seems to me in line with the teaching of Him with whom is 'neither male nor female, bond nor free.' But the advancement or retarding of that time will depend on the evidence woman gives that she is ready for such enfranchisement. There is such a thing as childhood and maturity in political thought ('when I was a child I thought as a child'), and not until those silly and senseless exhibitions of 'public women,' which of late years have saddened us all, are exchanged for saner methods, can the political advance of womanhood really take place.

IV. Last of all, note that Deborah's public service *did not lessen but rather increased her simple faith in the God of her fathers.*

There is abundant evidence of this all

through her glorious song, but the best proof of it is given in the fine description of the sunlike soul at the close. 'So let all Thine enemies perish, but let them that love Thee be as the sun when he cometh forth in his strength.' Hers was a sunlike soul from the very depths of her being. She could have said what Tennyson said of the sunflower, 'What the sun is to that flower, so is Jesus Christ to my soul.'

There is danger in being greatly gifted. 'Not many wise are called.' Many of our greatly gifted women in this age have been conspicuous not for their faith, but for the eclipse of it. It is a sad loss. What the sun is to the sunflower, so is Jesus Christ to a woman's soul. The eclipse of Him is the taking away of all the true brightness and comfort of her soul. There is a sad letter written by Mrs. Carlyle in her dark days. She complains that Carlyle has stolen her faith away, and that now she has nothing left to rest upon.

Never let such a theft be perpetrated by any pseudo-science in your life. No true science to-day has a word to say against the reality of the spiritual life. The best science

of our age is reverent in a sense that the science of Huxley and Herbert Spencer never pretended to be. Men now see that there is something more in heaven and earth than was dreamt of by that shallow philosophy. Come to the sunlight of God if you would wish your private life to be a restful one, and your public life to be a beneficent one.

V. In closing, we may note that though Deborah kept her faith in God nobly, she had her defects. *She was a little hard. She was fierce and unforgiving.*

We see that in her praise of Jael, the assassin of Sisera. No doubt Jael has much to condone her deed. Sisera was a heartless villain. He had murdered men: he had ruined women: he had laughed at the tears of little children. If Jael had 'put her hand to the hammer,' as for instance Charlotte Corday put hers to the dagger, and the dagger into Marat's cruel heart; if she had struck her enemy down in fair and open fight and given her life for her people, then I for one would have little to say against her. But to welcome the man as a guest, to pretend to be his friend, to lull him to

sleep with a smile, and then—then to draw near to the sleeping form and raise the hammer high to crash in the brains of the unconscious fugitive—this is not to be praised.

Yet Deborah praises it. Patriotism has made her cruel. She calls the assassin a blessed woman, and even exults in the cruel deed, painting a pathetic picture of Sisera's mother looking out of her window, longing for the son that is never to return. 'The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice . . . Why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped?'

A pathetic picture! The mother thus bending down to murmur reassuring words to her anxious heart! Was there a tear in Deborah's voice as she came to this part of the song? One would like to think so; but if so it is quickly brushed away. Jael is pronounced 'Blessed above women,' and with a malediction on all the enemies of God, and a beautiful benediction on His lovers, the song dies away.

The patriotism is so pure and so pas-

sionate that, as I have said, one cannot but love it where one disapproves. Yet what a difference Christ has made! No, the blessedness of woman is not for Jael. It was reserved for another—the mother of Him who was to teach men a grander recompense for injury than hatred and murder—'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.'

Public service tries both men and women. Men it is apt to narrow into bores, men of one idea who can talk of nothing else but their 'work.' Philanthropists are often the most dreary of men to live with. Hollingsworth in *The Blithedale Romance* was bitterly said by Coverdale to be only interested in a man when he was fit for the gaol.

Women it tries in another way. It is apt to make them hard, unfeminine, aggressive. Fighting with sin, they are apt to fight with every one, whether he is a sinner or not. Calling to the battle, they are apt to forget that 'a low, sweet voice is an excellent thing in woman.' Let us beware of these defects of what, after all, are noble qualities. While we emulate the

patriotism and public virtue of Deborah, let us try to avoid her limitations. Like her, let us learn to hate sin with a noble hatred. Like a Greater than her, let us learn to love the sinner with a nobler love.

VII

THE WOMAN OF THE HOME

'She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also.'—PROV. xxxi. 27, 28.

IN this beautiful passage King Lemuel gives us his portrait of the ideal wife. Some cynic may say, 'Surely an ideal wife is not a "common" woman!' But while it is true that there is none perfect, 'no, not one,' I am optimist enough to believe that there are women in every land who come pretty near this ideal, and that there are many in my own. The way Lemuel describes this woman, and the fact that its details were filled in by his own mother, makes me think that this is no fancy sketch, but a photograph from real life, or at least a composite one. And, as I have said, a similar portrait might be taken in many of 'the happy homes of England.' No doubt there are features here which belong to another age.

The 'spindle,' *e.g.*, to which this woman 'set her hands,' is not now a part of an ideal woman's outfit. I have seen it in some of our drawing-rooms; but I doubt if any of these have produced much, at least in their present abodes. Paisley mills have sent the industry of women into other channels. Nor is it essential that a good wife should now rise while it is yet dark, unless, indeed, in the depths of winter. With every favour to the 'Daylight-saving Bill,' it is quite possible to do a good day's work without getting up with the milkman. Still, take accidentals away, and the essentials remain the same. The clothes change: the features never. Let us look at these features to-night, and as we recognise their presence or absence in ourselves, let us apply the lesson, whether housewives or not.

Now there are four qualities which the wise man notes in this chapter as belonging to the ideal woman of the home. These are *loyalty*, *industry*, *sympathy*, and *a kindly tongue*. Let us take up these one by one, and let us begin with what is beyond question the most important of all in a wife, *loyalty to her husband*.

I. In many of our novels to-day, and I fear also in not a few of the plays which are allowed to pass the censor, there is a dead set being made at the old vows of loyalty and fidelity which a woman takes on her marriage day. It is no longer 'till death us do part,' but till 'disinclination' or 'incompatibility of temperament' us do part. The evil this kind of teaching works, both in the higher and lower ranks of society, is too well known, and I am not going to defile my lips and your minds by dwelling on it here. But as in some countries it has already made havoc of the marriage laws, let me say this: that to our Lord there is no commandment more full of solemn obligation than the fidelity which a man or woman vows at the altar. It was on this foundation that He reared the noble structure of Christian society in a corrupt and dissolute age, and the undermining of it will mean the ruin of any state or home where such pernicious ideas are allowed to gain predominance.

Now, the beauty of this old picture of the ideal wife lies in this: that in her case such ideas do not come in at all. That ugly word, jealousy, which a vain woman likes

because it seems to her a proof that she is liked, is an insult and a degradation to a good woman, and by our heroine is never heard at all. The state of things which could bring it about is utterly abhorrent to her. Platonic friendships, which to the unmarried may be harmless enough (though they are always dangerous), are to the ideal wife an abomination. She puts them away as the flimsy pretexts of the devil to lead her heart from its true allegiance, and the result is that 'the heart of her husband doth safely rest in her.' He is known by the very brightness of his face and the very neatness of his attire as he goes through the streets. 'Her husband is known in the gates when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.' It is the picture of an ideal union over whose love no shadow, save death's, can ever hang; such an one as is painted in the epitaph upon the grave of Charles Kingsley and his wife: 'Amavimus; Amamus; Amabimus.'

II. The second feature we notice in this ideal woman of the home is her *industry.*

She is not an idler, like so many of our better-class women. She does not fool away her time in reading novels, or chattering scandal, or going out to gaieties half the night and lying in bed half the day. No; she spends her precious hours in useful happy labour for her dear ones. 'She riseth while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens.'

In this industry we notice also a fine spirit of enterprise. 'She is,' says our artist, 'like a merchant ship that bringeth its food from afar.' You have seen a noble liner coming up the Channel laden with merchandise from the Far West or the wealthy Orient. The wheat is there from the prairie, the fruit from the sunny isles of the South, bales of cotton from the plantation, gold and silver from the mine. Such in its manifold activities is the 'spoil' of a good woman's hands. She too bringeth her meat 'from afar.' Schiller says of Mary Stewart (but in a very different sense):

'Everything becomes a weapon in her hands.'

So is it with this woman. She can turn everything to advantage. We speak of the

problem of poverty to-day, and no doubt it is a cruel one; but there would be much less of a problem if only the women of our land were more like this one. What is economy? It is not meanness, though it has often been mistaken for it. Lemuel here speaks of his model woman as clothing her household in scarlet and hanging her walls with tapestry. She was no miser, this domestic economist.

No, the true economy is the spirit of far-seeing management, the dexterous adaptation of everything to the use of the household. 'She seeth a field and buyeth it.' That waste ground out there—can she not use it in the interests of her family? No sooner said than done. She is not one of those who say, 'I'll think over it,' which means, 'I'll never do it.' No; she does it without apparently troubling her husband about it, showing that the Bible woman has a fine spirit of independence unknown to other Eastern lands.

Now, I do not advise you to buy a field without your husband's knowledge, else your field may turn out a *hole* from which you will find it difficult to extricate yourself.

But I think what Lemuel here meant to suggest was, that in the ideal union there should be such a confidence between husband and wife that the wife should not be under police surveillance all the time. She should have a free hand, and be left a broad margin in life's page for her own initiative.

There are some husbands so self-opinionated and tyrannical that nothing in the household has the least chance of acceptance which does not spring from their own colossal cranium. They are like Dickens's Mr. Dombey, to whom no wisdom existed save in himself, and woman was a being whose whole duty was summed up in worship of that glorious creature called Man. Such husbands suffer by their own success. The more they succeed in reducing their wives to slavery, the more do they lose of that free partnership in which 'two are better than one.'

III. I pass now to the third quality in the ideal woman of the home. She is a woman of *sympathy*. Woman's interest in home often begets a selfish indifference to all outside the home. The strengthening of

the stakes of home-love is carried to such an extent that it interferes with the lengthening of the cords of human sympathy. It is not so here. 'She stretcheth out her hands to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.' Though energetic, this woman is not hard, as energy tends to be. On the contrary, you can see her at her door often stretching out her hand with a piece of bread or a cup of fresh milk to the poor beggar as he passes along. In our day, when public charity is so much abused, and the public-house too often receives the results of human sympathy, there is a tendency to let charity die altogether. This is a vast mistake. 'Give to him that asketh of thee,' says Christ, 'and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.' There is no command in the New Testament more uncompromising in its plainness than the duty of almsgiving. We should never lightly turn a beggar from our door. If we cannot give him money, we can offer bread and warm food, and if the man obviously needs more than these, we should take time, *when we can*, to go into his case and be to him a friend in need.

The ideal woman is sympathetic to the needy, and she is also sympathetic to the stranger. Some women confine their hospitalities to great occasions. They never entertain but for show. Make your home like the house of Gaius, who ministered to the saints. By so doing your children will not be driven outside in search of that company which they never find within.

IV. Last of all, we note that this woman is *wise of speech.* 'She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and the law of kindness is in her lips.' Ruskin says that one of the 'chief ends of a woman is to please,' and that, 'if she does not do that, she has missed her vocation.' I would not go so far as that, but certainly an unpleasing woman is an anomaly in God's creation. God made man for strength and woman for grace. Now, woman's beauty is a quickly fading flower. 'Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain,' says Lemuel, thinking, doubtless, of the transformation which time had made in the women of his own acquaintance. But the grace of a true woman never fades, and one of its sweetest flowers is kindly speech.

A woman of charm never grows old. She carries her bright sweetness on to the silver hairs, and when she passes, leaves a fragrance that lingers long in the chambers of the memory.

This is the woman Lemuel here describes. 'The law of kindness is in her lips.' Note the word 'law.' She is not weak or soft: the sceptre of authority is there. Her word is the word of a queen. But she is a gracious queen, one who is neither harsh nor authoritative. Her very face and voice breathe the spirit of benignant strength.

There is almost no element on which the wise man lays more stress than this: wisdom and gentleness in a woman's tongue. Again and again he dwells on the misery wrought by a contentious woman. Was it that woman's tongue in these days was barbed with a keener sting? Or does he lay his finger here on a temptation of womanhood in every age? I believe myself that human nature suffers no substantial change from age to age. We are essentially the same men and women to-day as built the Pyramids. When, therefore, the Bible sets it down as a special excellence in a married woman that

she can bridle her tongue, I take it as a wise and true guide. I believe more homes are marred by strong words than by strong drink. We hear (and deservedly hear) much of the evil wrought by the one ; but we hear far too little of the other. Remember that words are living things. They are like seeds : they never die. They germinate in the heart, and bring forth fruit in bitterness or blessedness. If you have a sharp tongue, ask God to enable you to bridle it, for you will never be an ideal woman, married or otherwise, so long as it remains. That is no easy prayer to be answered, but by the grace of God it can be answered, and one of the means by which it may be answered is by reflecting how much bitterness a hasty word may do long after it has been uttered, and perhaps forgotten by the utterer.

There is an old story told of a woman who was cursed with a bitter tongue. She came to her father-confessor one day and confessed this besetting sin, and asked him to show her some way by which she might conquer it. 'Go home to your farm, my good woman,' said the holy man, 'and kill there your fattest fowl, and then come back

here, plucking it by the way, and give me the hen as a penance for your sin.' The woman did so. She brought the fowl back, plucking it by the way. 'Now,' he said, 'bring this fowl to the woman you have injured as a reparation for your words, and *then go and gather these feathers you have plucked by the way, and bring them back to me.*' The woman brought the bird to the woman she had injured, and they were made friends from that hour; but when she went back to gather up the feathers that had been plucked, she could only find one or two, for the wind had blown the rest all away. 'These,' she said, 'these, Father, are all I could find, search as I would. The wind has blown the rest away.' 'Yes,' said her confessor, 'and when you are next about to speak angry or malicious words, remember that they are like these feathers. *They are easy to pluck, but very difficult to gather back again.*' The woman learned her difficult lesson. From that day 'the law of kindness was on her lips.'

To close, what was the secret of this woman's gifts and graces? Was it a noble mind, an energetic temperament, a natur-

ally gracious manner? No; these were but the outflow of the stream. The hidden source was far away. Hear the wise man's conclusion of the whole matter: 'A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.' The crown of the ideal woman of the home is like every other crown: it can only be won after a hard struggle. The drain on temper and energy and calm of soul which the ceaseless cares of a household make on a woman, can only be repaired by getting in touch with a fountain that is as inexhaustible as life itself. That fountain is prayer. You remember what Jesus said to one who was by no means an ideal woman: 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up to everlasting life.' To drink daily of this fountain, to portion off a part of the day, especially the morning hour, with prayer, to have a quiet time with God, this would give calm and freshness to the soul in the heat and dust of life, and so prevent those break-downs in temper and spirit which

are so often the portion of the harassed housewife.

'There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.'

Shall we not try this more in the future, whether as men or women? If we did, we should find it pay in every sense of the word. Life would grow sweeter and fresher. The cares of life would 'fold their tents like the Arabs and silently steal away.' Home would be truly a 'sweet home' to its inmates; and when the close of day would ring out its soft evensong, our children would rise up around our dying-bed and call us 'blessed.'

VIII

THE WOMAN OF THE STREETS

'A woman in the city, which was a sinner.'—Luke vii. 37.

There are some stories whose originality is the proof that they are divine. We recognise them like the well-known hand of a familiar friend. We feel, as we read them, that none but Christ could have acted so. They bear stamped on their very face the impress of Him who spake as never man spake.

This story is one of these. As we read its simple but moving record, we are compelled to say, no human imagination could have invented this. As some one said of the *Pilgrim's Progress*:

> 'Methinks that God speaks here;
> No tinker hath such powers.'

The things indeed of which it tells are common enough. Too common! The woman in the city who was a sinner; the

inexorable judgment of society on that sin—these things are as old as creation, and alas! as new as yesterday. But what gives uniqueness to the story is the figure of Him who stands between the two, who condemns the sin with a far more searching condemnation than Pharisaism ever knew, and yet loves the sinner; whose purity is so great that He can accept love's tears and ointment as the pledge of a forgiveness that is past and the promise of a life that is to come. 'And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.'

I. Of the past life of this woman I am going to say as little as may be. She belongs to a type that is too sadly familiar to-day, a type as old as civilisation and as modern. As Lecky, the historian, has well said, 'While creeds and civilisations rise and fall, she remains, the eternal priestess of Humanity, blasted for the sins of the people.'

But Christ had saved her from that. How, we do not know. Perhaps she had listened to one of those moving sermons which had drawn the publicans and sinners 'for to hear Him.' There is no key so well fitted to

unlock this type of heart as the key of memory. And fleshly sins, though more degrading, are, as Dante reminds us, not so deeply ingrained as the sins of the spirit. 'The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom before you,' said Jesus to the Pharisees.

Mr. Begbie, in one of his beautiful studies in *The Hand of the Potter*, tells of a woman of this class who was saved simply by the gift of a flower from the loving hand of a Christian 'sister' in the streets of London.

'The flower was white. The idea of this whiteness pervaded her consciousness. She made a contrast of the whiteness of that flower and the spreading darkness of her own soul. She said to herself, "I was once white like this flower." She looked at the white flower through a mist of pain and said to herself, "I wish I could be pure." She covered her eyes with her hands, moved her face to the pillow, and wept.'

These tears were the beginning of a spiritual process that ended in her complete salvation. The 'white flower' unlocked the cabinet of memory. The vision of the past shaped itself into a resolution for the future. Something like this may have saved this woman. Perhaps she was one of those who listened to the tale of the prodigal. As Christ spoke of the far country and the

swine-trough, she said, 'That *is* me!' As He told of the new resolution, 'I will arise and go to my Father,' she said, 'Would that that *were* me!' As He pictured the Father waiting at the window, looking at the door to welcome the child back with a kiss of love, she cried, 'That *shall* be me'; and so, with all the rags of her shame upon her, she came back to her Father, and in Him found mercy.

Thus amid the crowd of honoured guests she came, half afraid, more than half ashamed, yet drawn by the irresistible cords of love to fling herself at the feet of Him who had thus brought her back to God and purity, her Saviour and her Lord; and to testify, by the tribute of her ointment and her tears, how much she owed and how greatly she loved.

Nor does He refuse that gift. What might have been unseemly for another, was not so for Him. For, as the sunlight glorifies even the fetid pool and makes it shine like a sheet of gold, so He who was absolutely pure could freely accept this offering and transfigure it into the devotion of a saint. Before she had once used these

things as the instruments of sin: now she can use them as the symbols of holy consecration. And so she stood behind Him, 'kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.'

But meanwhile there was present one to whom all this was a spectacle arousing only the deepest disgust. It was Simon the Pharisee. He had done Jesus the courtesy of asking Him to dinner, not because he had any regard for Him, but because of His fame. Christ was a popular preacher whom his pride liked to patronise, his curiosity to see. But there was no real kindness in the act. There was none of that attention he would have been eager to show to an honoured guest. 'Thou gavest Me no kiss. Thou gavest Me no water. My head with oil thou didst not anoint.' He was only a Galilean peasant: why waste his best on One who could not appreciate it?

And now this patronage deepens into positive contempt. 'This woman here—what a degradation! And allowing her to be touching Him in that familiar way! He can be no prophet, else He had known what she is. The whole thing is utterly

indecent. I would turn her out, but it would only make a scene. But this will be the last time such characters enter my house.'

II. Such, we imagine, were Simon's thoughts during that strange scene, and as we read them we are brought face to face with the second great figure in the drama, the Pharisee, the type of the world's judgment on this class of sins. 'This woman that toucheth Him, she is a sinner.'

The world has two ways of judging sin. One is that of undue laxity, the other is that of pitiless severity. Society usually judges sin with extraordinary lenity. It hardly knows the word indeed. The faults of youth it readily condones under the euphemism of 'wild oats' or 'young blood.' The errors of the rich or the titled it deliberately shuts its eyes to. Let a man have an income of five figures; let him have blue blood in his veins; let him be handsome in appearance and correct in manners; and though he commit half the crimes in the calendar, society will welcome him to its inner circle. There is, however, one sin to which society

knows no mercy. It is the capital offence of impropriety. It is strict to mark the iniquity of even minor offences against 'good form.' It ostracises their authors as 'a bounder' and 'a cad'; but the great improprieties put a man beyond the pale of mercy both in this world and the next. Let a man do what he likes in private; but let the judge put on the 'black cap' over him in an open court—in other words, let him be found out—and society has no more use for him. He is improper. He must be dropped.

For the second way the world has of judging sin is that of *undue severity*—severity without love. That is the way of Pharisaism. It condemns the sin, and justly, but it also dooms the sinner. It knows no forgiveness. It has no mercy. When a man or woman (especially a woman) is down, he or she is down for ever.

Something of both these tempers, perhaps, is to be seen in Simon here. 'This woman that toucheth Him' represents the first: 'she is a sinner' the second. There was, to begin with, something improper in the whole proceeding. That probably disgusted Simon as much as anything else. The whole ex-

hibition was low, vulgar, unworthy of his refined table. And then comes the damning addition, 'She is a sinner.' She was a sinner yesterday, and therefore is to-day, and shall be evermore. There is no reformation possible for such a character. Her doom is sealed in that word 'sinner.'

Is there not something of that spirit too often still in our attitude to all sin, and especially to such sins as are here described? You know there is. We have shown it ourselves. Too often have we failed to plead the 'first offender's act' in our judgments of fallen men, and especially fallen women. Too often has the Fifth Beatitude come with no meaning to our merciless ears. Yes, there is one place where society and Pharisaism meet and join hands in practical agreement: it is in their judgment of this woman and such as she. Still as ever it is 'the woman who pays' for the great social cancer of modern life. And not until, in legislation and social recognition alike, the man and the woman are placed on an equal footing of condemnation and of mercy, can our modern civilisation be truly said to be permeated with the spirit of Christ.

III. Let us now pass to the third figure in this story, the stern and yet gracious picture of the Christ, as He stands here at once as the Judge and the Advocate.

The scene is one of dramatic vividness. Seldom in the New Testament have we a more moving and thrilling climax; and our English translators here have risen to the full height of their power in describing it, and clothed the scene with language among the finest in the New Testament.

There is first the ominous calm of Christ —a calm before a storm, as in quiet yet arresting tones He opens the dialogue, 'Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.' Then comes the question, put in the form of a kind of ethical proportion sum, of the debtors that owed, the one five hundred and the other fifty pence—a question that needs no answer.

We can almost hear the boredom in the tones of Simon's voice as he replies to so trifling a question, 'I suppose he to whom he forgave most.' Then with dramatic swiftness Jesus turns to the half-concealed figure behind. 'Seest thou this woman?' he demands, with authority and indignation

quivering in every tone. 'I entered *thine* house. Thou gavest me *no water for my feet*; she hath washed *my feet with tears*. Thou gavest me *no kiss*; this woman hath not ceased to *kiss my feet*. My *head* with *oil* thou didst not anoint; this woman hath anointed my *feet* with *ointment*.' Note the beautiful contrast. 'Thou gavest no *water*; she hath washed with *tears*.' 'Thou gavest no *oil*; she hath anointed with *ointment*.' 'Thou hadst nothing even for my *head*; she hath lavished her love upon my *feet*.'

'Wherefore her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but'—and now the storm gathers to its lightning flash—'to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little!' At one moment He reveals the depths of love in that contrite heart, and at the next the cold, unloving, because unforgiven heart of the Pharisee. Then the thunderclouds roll away, and the gentle peace of sweet forgiveness closes the scene. 'Thy faith hath saved thee; go into[1] peace.'

'Her sins are forgiven, for she loved much.' Note the precise meaning of that word

[1] So the original, εἰς εἰρήνην.

'*for*.' Some sadly misunderstand it. They think it means Christ forgave her because she loved much. She was a soft and loving creature, and therefore Christ forgave her the faults which were natural to such a character. So sometimes we hear people speak of erring women still—'Poor thing! Forgive her, for she has a kind and tender heart. She is more sinned against than sinning.' However allowable that may or may not be, it has nothing to do with Christ's argument here. It was not her love that was the cause of her forgiveness. Christ Himself puts that beyond a doubt. 'Thy *faith*,' not thy love, 'hath saved thee.' No, it was her forgiveness that was the cause of her love. The argument is not one from cause to effect: it is, as the parable shows, one from effect to cause. The little forgiven loves little, the much forgiven loves much. 'This woman has shown Me much love, therefore she must be much forgiven. You, O Simon, have shown Me but little love to-day.' What must be the presumption? I leave your conscience to draw the conclusion.

What, then, is the divine method of dealing

with sin as it is here depicted? It is just the old Pauline way of free forgiveness to simple faith. The woman did not come to Simon's house to be forgiven; she came because she was forgiven already. Already in the 'dark night of the soul' she had drawn near to God in simple contrite faith, saying,

> 'Just as I am, and waiting not
> To rid my soul of one dark blot,
> To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
> O Lamb of God, I come!'

But that free, forgiving love could not be kept to herself. She must find an outlet to it, and so away to the Pharisee's house she hies, of all places the most unlikely for her in the world—to go where a stronger force than any fear is drawing her, and there to pour at the feet of her Lord the tribute of her tears and her ointment, everything her poor heart can suggest, in willing service and sacrifice to so great a Saviour.

'Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.' My brother, tried by such a test, where do you and I appear? Alas! is it not too often on the

side of Simon? How little of the warm exuberance of this woman's love is in our life! How cold and mechanical too often is worship! How dull and restrained our devotions! How poor and grudging our service! As one has said, 'What love is this of thine, that wastes no alabaster-boxes, is never lavish of its thanks, nor ever gushes out with any unrestrainable tenderness of feeling? Hast thou then been forgiven so very little that thou canst only give the cold decent proprieties of a circumspect and just man, who never was lost, instead of the melted, repentant love of a pardoned harlot, a returned prodigal, or a converted Peter?'

But you will say, 'How can I give a love like hers, since I never wandered so far away?' To that I answer, it is not farness from God, it is nearness to Christ, that gives this love. Read the passionate outburst of confession and penitent love in the *Autobiography* of a St. Teresa or the *Grace Abounding* of a Bunyan, and you would think their authors to be the vilest of the vile. Yet the latter confesses that 'if all the fornicators of England were hanging by the neck, John Bunyan would still be alive.'

It was because they crept close to Christ, and saw their souls in that purest light, that they felt themselves 'the chief of sinners.' Creep close to the Saviour, my brother; ask the Holy Spirit to convince you of your great need. Then the tears will flow, and when the tears begin to flow, the ointment will quickly follow. Saved by such a Saviour, saved with so great a salvation, your feet will be swift to fly to your Lord with the most precious thing in your possession, there to break it at His feet, and sing with sobbing gladness the words of St. Teresa's favourite psalm, 'I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever; with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations.'

One word in closing on the Bible type of modern woman our story brings before us. Let us say it in all delicacy; yet it must be said. The Church of Jesus can never rest till this great social cancer is radically dealt with. The Rev. J. Rattenbury said truly not long ago, there should be a companion picture to Holman Hunt's 'Light of the World.' A noble church with the front door open, so that one might see its gorgeous luxury

enriched by modern art and civilisation, the worshippers kneeling in prayer towards the altar at the distant end, and behind them at the door, fallen on the doorstep, a fallen woman in all her guilt and wretchedness, a beggar and a slum child. Above the picture he would put Holman Hunt's text, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock,' for that is the way Jesus is knocking at the door of the modern church.

Yes, truly, this woman in her wretchedness and misery is a loud knock at the door of the self-satisfied church of to-day. And two things she calls on the Church to give her—Justice and Mercy. She calls for justice on these monsters of iniquity, both men and women, who for filthy lucre—ah! was it ever so filthy?—are procuring this vile thing, making it possible to be created and maintained. Thank God for the brave work Mr. Stead did in the past to save the falling sisters of our land. But much still needs to be done, and the Church is called on by Christ to be up and doing and see an end to the legislation that spreads its hideous cloak over this abominable sin.

And then she knocks, this woman, at

the church's door for mercy. How much Pharisaism in the modern church member still, in regard to this sin! Let us be as hard as we like on the sin—we cannot be too hard—but let us remember the sinner is one of Christ's lost sheep, one of the lambs for which He died. As we see Him welcoming the sobbing tears of this poor lost woman of the streets, let us hear Him saying to us, 'Go thou and do likewise.' 'Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of these, ye do it unto Me.'

IX

THE WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

'Thou God seest me.'—Gen. xvi. 13.

This was God's heartening message to poor Hagar when she fled from the hard face of Sarai. She was a woman who felt keenly that she was of no importance at all, and was tempted in consequence to throw her life back into the face of God. In that respect I dare say she is far from being a singular character in any age. She represents a large enough constituency to-day. There are multitudes, tens of thousands, in our great cities all over the world who feel they belong to the class she represents; the class a modern writer has so well denominated 'the woman of no importance.'

How did Hagar come to feel this? First, probably, by reason of her very womanhood. A woman in the East is too often a being of little importance. The disability

of sex is very real on the other side of the Mediterranean. She is treated little better than a slave—her hands to work for, her body to amuse, her very soul a toy to fling at the feet of the despot who calls himself man. Yes, surely, woman in the East is too often what Hagar felt herself to be, of no importance whatever; nothing to miss, little to lose. In the West, one is glad to think, it is not so. We have Christ in the first instance to thank for that. It is only in Christ that there is 'neither male nor female'; everywhere else, as missionary accounts prove, the weaker goes to the wall.

But though woman is not by any means a being of no importance in modern life, it cannot be denied that there are tens and thousands of women in this enlightened land of ours who feel, and keenly feel, that their life is sadly hampered by the limitations of their sex; that with their gifts and talents they might very easily rise into positions which their more fortunate brothers occupy; that their labour has to be sold at a cheaper wage, and that, in a thousand other ways, their whole range of

experience, and their whole sphere of activity, is 'cribbed, cabined and confined' by the fact that they are 'just women.'

We men ought to remember that in our attitude to the other sex, and show more chivalry than I think we are sometimes disposed to do. No doubt there are many women who do what they can to kill that feeling by the unwomanly conduct they show. Still, we must try to overcome evil with good, and not allow the old chivalries to pass out of sight because of the rudeness of what after all are only a few monstrosities.

But there was another and still more potent reason why Hagar should feel herself to be a creature of no importance to any one. She was so poor, so ungifted. Had Hagar been a beautiful or a wealthy woman, it would have been very different. A woman like Sarai her mistress, for example, who possesses a face that charms, a manner that wins, or a fortune that dazzles, can never be a being of no importance. On the contrary she may, like Mary Stewart, control the destiny of nations and make the blood of thousands flow. Hagar had none of these

gifts. She was only a slave, very possibly a poor-looking slave, else Sarai had never allowed her to occupy the position she did. Such types of women exist in hundreds to-day. They are the working women of the world. You can see crowds of them in our streets at every meal-hour, as they pass and repass to their place of toil. They are of no importance whatever in the world. If they were to die, no paragraph would notice their departure in the most local of newspapers. Their life would drop like a rain-drop into the river with the slender ripple of a tear on a mother's or father's face. What wonder, in such a narrow existence, the temptation to be discouraged and sink down into moral apathy, or even intemperance and immorality? Anything to give life a taste, a zest! Anything to make it worth the living! This was Hagar's temptation, the temptation to fling her life away and throw herself

'Anywhere, everywhere, out of the world,'

a world that has less interest in her than a dog.

Mr. Gissing, that pessimist of novelists, has

a story about this type. He calls it *The Odd Women*. It is about three lonely girls left desolate by their father's death. That father is a doctor, and his girls are gentlewomen, but with no knowledge of anything marketable. One has a little beauty, and this she lays out to the best advantage she can, by marrying a man she does not love—one she can never love, but one who can give her a home. The other two are absolutely ungifted either in mind or body. The one sinks into intemperance; the other, with a little more character, struggles on in a feeble way, but with a tenuity of existence that cannot be called life. In the end the married sister flies from her home and dies miserably. The other two, left with her child, struggle on as best they may. The impression one gets from the story is one of sadness and even despair. Gissing has no religious outlook; and without faith, how tragic is the lot of the 'woman of no importance'!

But that is not the impression left on us here. In our text we see God's message to 'the woman of no importance.' It is a

very beautiful message, and if I could only bring out its beauty as I should, it is full of encouragement to us all. For there are times when many of us, men and women alike, feel that we are of not much importance to any one. Like the old prophet we say, 'I have laboured in vain. I have spent my strength for nought and in vain.' In such an hour it is a great thing to hear the voice which Hagar heard that day in the desert, 'Thou God seest me.'

Picture the scene. When Hagar went out that grey morning from the tents of Abraham, her heart was very full. She could bear it no longer—this ceaseless tyranny and abuse from her mistress. So she flies away to Egypt. It was once her home. Perhaps she may light on some friend there. A father? a mother? Ah! these are doubtless long since dead. But surely there will be some one there to give her shelter and perhaps love. But Egypt is farther than she bargained for. Her strength is fast ebbing away; her slender store of bread and fruit is gone; and alone in the desert, she feels her own insignificance as she had never felt it before, and flings herself down

by this wayside well, there to wait till death put an end to her sufferings. No one cares for her. No one wants her. Why fight any longer? Let her lie down and die. 'It is enough: take away my life.'

> 'Death is the end of life: ah, why
> Should life all labour be?
> Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
> And in a little while our lips are dumb.
> Let us alone.'

So she dreams in sad despair, when suddenly, out of the dim silence of the sultry sky, a voice seems to speak. 'Hagar, Sarai's maid,' it calls, 'whence comest thou, and whither wilt thou go?' Is she dreaming and only asleep? Or is this death then, and that a beautiful angel in the paradise of God? For as she lifts her eyes she sees a shining form before her with a mild and pitiful glance looking down upon her. No, it is not death. It is life the angel speaks of. 'Go back,' he says, 'to thy old life; go back to thy duty, but go back with a new hope in thy heart, and a new courage in thy soul. Think no longer that thou art a woman of no importance. Thou art a mother. Can any mother who truly realises her vocation be a

woman of no importance? And in thy case thou art a mother from whom is to come a mighty nation, yea, a mightier in some respects even than Sarai's, thy mistress. Poor, unknown, outcast girl though thou seemest to be, thou shalt be the progenitor of a nation.'

That was heartsome news to poor Hagar; but what was still more heartening to her was this, that *God had not forgotten her*. Yea, He had even deigned to give her a vision of His glory—a privilege hitherto reserved only for great and holy men. What a God that must be who regarded a poor slave like her! He had His eye even on her! Yes, her little commonplace life was not outside the glance of His all-seeing and all-loving eye—'Thou God seest me.' As she thought of it all a new spring of life began to leap through all her nerves. She turned to the old wayside well and gave it a new name, 'the well of Him that liveth and seeth,' or, as it has been interpreted by scholars, 'the well of the life of vision'—the water of life which comes to him who drinks not merely of this earthly spring, but drinks of the living water of the vision of God.

And surely it is so! Could there be any message more encouraging, to one who is tempted with the temptation of life's insignificance, than the thought that though outwardly we may seem a mere atom in the vast universe of being, a mere sand-grain in the sandy desert of existence, a mere drop in the surging ocean of life, we are not unknown to God, not uncared for by His love—that the 'very hairs of our head are numbered,' and that we are of as infinite value to God as a child is to the mother that begat him?

'Thou God seest me.'—You remember how the psalmist has made that the text of one of his grandest meditations. 'O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.' You remember how another has put the same thought in an even more tender way when he assures himself, 'Thou tellest my wanderings. Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle. Are they not in Thy book?'

'Happy they,' says one,[1] 'who, when God

[1] Dr. Dods.

has thus met them and sent them back on their own footsteps, have still been so filled with a sense of God's love in caring for them through all their errors, that they obey and return. . . . When our regrets for the past become intolerably poignant and bitter; when we see a waste of years behind us barren as the sand of the desert, with nothing done but what should, but cannot be undone; when the heart is stupefied with the sense of its madness and of the irretrievable loss it has sustained; or when we look to the future and are persuaded little can grow out of such a past, this is God besetting us behind and before. And may He grant us strength to pray, "Show me Thy ways. O Lord, teach me Thy paths; for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day."'

'Thou God seest me'—this you remember was the favourite text of Jess, one of Barrie's finest characters in his *Window in Thrums*. It was the text of her little boy 'Joey,' who had been taken from her in a moment; killed when a little child by a passing van, almost before her eyes.

'Mony, mony a time,' Jess would fondly

recall, 'after he came in frae the kirk on the Sabbath, he would stand up at this very window and wave his hands in a reverent way, juist like the minister. His first text was to be, "Thou God seest me." He would say to me, "It doesna do, mother, for the minister in the pulpit to nod to ony o' the fowk, but I 'll gie ye a look an' ye 'll ken it 's me. The other fowk will be sittin' in their seats wonderin' what my text 's to be, but you 'll ken, mother, an' you 'll turn up to 'Thou God seest me' afore I gie out the chapter." Aye, but that day he was coffined: for all the minister prayed, I found it hard to say, "Thou God seest me." It 's the text I like best noo, though, an' when Hendry an' Lieby is at the kirk, I turn 't up often, often in the Bible. I read frae the beginnin' o' the chapter, but when I come to "Thou God seest me," I stop. Na, it 's no 'at there 's ony rebellion to the Lord in my heart; no, for I ken He was lookin' doon when the cart gaed ower Joey, an' He wanted to tak' my laddie to Himsel'. But juist when I come to "Thou God seest me," I let the book lie in my lap, for aince a body 's sure o' that, they 're sure o' all.'

And that is true. Once a man is sure of that, he is sure of all. How then do we become sure of it? We become sure of it, I answer, in a great experience, the greatest of all experiences—the finding God in our life as no mere abstract proposition, but as a living Person who hears and answers prayer. That experience usually takes place through some special providence in our life. God leads us into the desert, as He led Hagar. He 'allures us into the wilderness that He may speak comfortably to us,' that He may reveal Himself to us as a God who sees us and knows us, and loves us with an everlasting love. The Voice speaks to us. It may speak to you in this church to-night, as it spoke to Hagar at the well of Lahai-roi, making this church to you ever after 'holy ground,' a well of living water, 'the well of the life of vision'; the place where you made the best discovery which life can give to a man, the discovery of God.

That is the true consecration. That is what makes the church what Newman has beautifully called it—'the home of the lonely'—because it is here men so often see God;

because it is here His Voice comes to them in their sore need, and makes them realise 'Thou God seest me.' May it be so often here! It ought to be so, for we have 'a more sure word of prophecy' than ever Hagar had. We have the Angel of the Covenant in clearer vision than she could know, in the Person and the Presence of the Lord Jesus, who comes to men's hearts to teach them that He loves them with an infinite love, and that if they will only put their lives into His hands, He will lead them out of the desert into pastures of unfading greenness, and by waters of perpetual stillness.

I remember once passing through an Alpine valley where one side of the mountain was covered with masses of rock and gravel, scoring the long hillsides with lines of débris. It was evidently in early spring the scene of frequent avalanches. Right in the midst of the valley, by the roadside, was a house. Above it was the country church with its churchyard wall all round, protecting it from the dangers above. It was a beautiful symbol to me of what the Church should always be—a protection from the storms of

trial and the avalanches of temptation that threaten from the dark mountains of sin. But more striking still was a huge buttress of mason-work like a fort, which had been built some fifty yards up the hillside above both the church and the manse. 'That,' I said to myself, 'that is true security. First the church protecting the manse, and then the fortress protecting the church.'

And what is the fortress that protects the Church? As I put the question to myself the words of an old prophet came unasked into my mind: 'A Man shall be as an hiding-place from the tempest and as a covert from the storm; as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'

X

THE WOMAN OF SELF-IMPORTANCE

'Thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever.'—Isaiah xlvii. 7.

In my last lecture I spoke about 'the woman of no importance.' When it was over, a lady said to me: 'So far good; but what about the woman of great importance—of self-importance? Have you nothing to say of her?'

Well, that is a more difficult subject; but as a lady gave it me, I should be a coward not to undertake the task; and the audience I see here to-night proves that the subject is not without interest! If there are none of the type here, there must be not a few known to you who come under the category!

Truth to tell, there are many, both men and women, who are afflicted with an undue sense of their importance. The prophet Isaiah gives a vivid picture of some of these high-stepping dames of his day. 'The daughters of Zion,' he says, 'are haughty.

They walk with stretched-out necks and wanton eyes. They strut and mince as they go. They make a tinkling with their feet. Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab, the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion. . . . In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments, and instead of a sweet smell, there shall be foulness; instead of well-set hair, baldness; instead of a girdle a rope, and burning instead of beauty.'

'Esaias is very bold.' One hardly wonders at the tradition he was sawn asunder, when he spoke of the women in that fashion. Yet, it must be sorrowfully admitted, in some cases — by no means the majority — Esaias is right. There are 'haughty' women in our streets still. You can tell them, as the prophet says, by their very walk. 'They strut and mince' — was that an ancient form of the Grecian bend ?— 'as they go.' Milton had them in his eye when he painted Delilah:

> 'Who is this . . .
> Comes this way sailing
> Like a stately ship,
> Sails filled and streamers waving ?'

This is the picture the prophet has in view in our text when he makes the daughter of Babylon say in her pride, 'I shall be a *lady* for ever.' Notice the word 'lady.' The message is to a city, but the picture is that of a woman—a woman in her pride of rank and glory. There is, of course, nothing bad in the word 'lady' itself. On the contrary, its derivation has reference to a woman's honest labour for the man she loves. In the original sense of the word the lady of the house was its bread-maker —or baker—just as the man was its bread-winner. To be a lady in the truest sense of the word is to be man's helper—gentle, strong, unselfish.

But the word, like its kindred 'gentleman,' has got degraded. Too often 'lady' is a synonym for 'fine lady.' It has become another word for woman's pride and snobbishness. This is the meaning here. When Babylon says 'I shall be a lady for ever,' she means 'I shall be a "fine lady" for ever.' Hence the prophet's denunciation. Her fine-ladyism, he tells her, will come to a tragic end. Her self-importance will pass in shame and ruin.

Let us look at this vice to-night. I need not say it is not confined to women. Perhaps it is more disfiguring there. The marring of the beautiful is more pitiable than the disfigurement of the strong. But it is found as much in men as in women, and therefore, though addressing women, I am speaking to men. What, then, is the root of self-importance? Our previous study will help us here. In considering Hagar we saw her temptation was 'insignificance.' She had little: therefore she had nothing, nay, *was* nothing. In the haughty woman the opposite is the case. She has much, therefore she is tempted to think she *is* much. Pride of possession becomes her ruin; a threefold pride, as it connects itself either with *rank*, *wealth*, or *intellect*. Let us look at these three types of woman's pride to-night, and let us illustrate them with three Bible types of them — *Michal*, the wife of David, as the type of pride of rank; *Salome*, the mother of Zebedee's children, as representing pride of wealth; and *Miriam*, the sister of Moses, as typifying pride of intellect.

I. And first the *pride of rank*. You remember the sharp-cut vignette the Bible gives of this, as it paints before us that haughty face at the palace window, bitter with its scorn, as the sacred procession passes by. It is one of the great days in David's life; perhaps gladder to him than all his victories. For the Ark—the sacred symbol of the Presence of that God to whom, with all his faults, he was devoted in every fibre of his being—this Ark is coming home to his capital, there to abide for ever and be the centre of that beautiful temple which is to arise around it and enshrine its awful glory. In such an hour his gladness knows no bounds. He dances his way up the streets, caring nothing of what men will say, caring only for his God.

Nor did they say anything, except one who should have been the most ready to sympathise with his hopes and dreams—Michal, the wife of his youth, the sharer of his perils, his heart and crown. She sees and feels nothing of all this. Her eyes are only for the degrading spectacle of a king forgetting his dignity. She sees in it only a vulgar exhibition. How shameless

it is! How could David so forget himself! She, a queen and a queen's daughter, to be mated with such a man! How different would her father have been! He was every inch a king. She despised him in her heart, and unfortunately could not keep her scorn to herself, reading her husband that night a very bitter curtain lecture, and cutting him deep with the lash of her biting sarcasm: 'How shamelessly did the king uncover himself to-day!'

We need not pursue the unedifying scene. David's love received a fatal blow. We cannot approve the unforgiving spirit he showed. Yet we can understand it. His love had been dying probably long before. That night it gave up the ghost.

Alas! how often does pride kill love. Love has no more cruel foe than it. Read Tennyson's *Aylmer's Field*, and you will see how a house can be brought to desolation by pride. The poet of the court knew well—perhaps from experience—how cruelly it can wound true love. Again and again, in *Maud*, *Locksley Hall*, *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, he returns to the theme, and shows how this sweet flower

of the soul can be soiled and trampled and killed by this wicked pride of blood.

It is in *Aylmer's Field* that he rises to his greatest heights on this subject, showing what misery and ruin it can work in the heart that gives it a home. If any of you are tempted to be proud because of your rank or blood, and if you are allowing that pride to stifle down the true love that is trying to get into your hearts, read that poem, I beseech you. It will teach you better than any words of mine the awful ruin that self-importance can bring you to. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Yes; and cursed are the proud in spirit, for the kingdom of hell is theirs!

II. And if the pride of blood is a cursed thing, the *pride of wealth* is even worse. For pride of rank is usually associated with a certain nobility of mien and self-respect, which at least keep their possessors from stooping to what is dishonourable. *Noblesse oblige.* But the conceit born of mere wealth is ignoble in every sense of the word. It swells out its victim to a vulgar pomposity, which is as ridiculous as it is offensive. I

was reading an American book lately on 'Success.' The great message of this writer is '*Get on or get out.*' 'We must get classified,' he says. 'Some of us are *plain eggs*, others are *fresh eggs*. And the way to get labelled *fresh eggs* is to have the power of making money. This,' he continues, 'is one of the most difficult arts to which a man can put his mind. Before a man can begin to save money, he must save himself. But it is worth the effort. For money isn't really money. Money is brains. Money is life. If you have no money, existence ceases. Keep knocking and hammering. Plead and insist. Watch and work and strive, and you will win. When you get success, sit down and read the Sermon on the Mount and learn what to do with it.'

Could anything be more fatuous? As a reviewer put it, 'It is a new reading of the Sermon on the Mount.' Seek ye *last* the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you.

It may seem hard measure to bring in poor Salome as the type of a character like this. No doubt there were other motives in her heart when she put forward James

and John, and begged for them the foremost place in the coming kingdom. And yet surely this was part of it. From the Gospel records we learn that her husband Zebedee owned his boat, and had hired servants to do his work. His family, too, was known to the High Priest at Jerusalem. We may therefore assume that she stood on a higher social plane than the others. This Salome felt. Along with her mother's love she thought her boys had the best right to the highest place in the new kingdom. She became a self-important woman.

There are such men and women in all our churches. Who does not know them? The man who, because he has an income of four or five figures, thinks he can lord it over God's heritage. The woman who, because she drives her carriage, thinks she can ride over all her sisters. They worry their poor minister, antagonise their fellow-members until their room is better than their company. Let us beware of the spirit of Demetrius. Let us ever esteem others better than ourselves. Let us seek the lowest seat in the synagogue, and be ready for the humblest service. And then Christ

shall one day come to us and say, 'Friend, go up higher.'

Have you heard the dream of the self-important woman? This woman had cancelled her gifts and resigned her membership because she was not allowed her own way in the church. She was meditating one night what new church she could carry her self-importance to, when she fell asleep and dreamed a dream. She was standing before the door of a stately cathedral. Above its gorgeous portal rose a splendidly decorated window. But what strange gap was that right under it? Just above the beautiful door, that ugly hole in the wall! She turned to an angel and said, 'What is that?' And the angel replied, 'That is the place *you were meant to fill*.' She awoke from her dream. It was not all a dream. May it not be all a dream to you and me. God knows the place we can fill the best. Let us take what He gives, humbly and thankfully, saying with the psalmist —'I had rather be a *door-mat*[1] in the house of the Lord, than dwell in the tents of sin.'

[1] So the word 'door-keeper' means in the original.

III. The last, and perhaps least common form of pride in woman, is *pride of intellect.* And Miriam is the Bible type of this. In many respects she was a noble woman. She stands out as one of the great patriots of her race, tuning her high timbrel to sing the song of Israel's great deliverance. The gifts of music and poetry were hers, and all were consecrated with a rare devotion. To her in his helpless days Moses owed a mother's love and care, and it was probably under her influence he grew up the patriot he was.

But these days are past now. Moses has gone out of her influence. That 'Ethiopian woman,' as she contemptuously called his wife, has taken the brother beloved away from his sister's loving arms. It is a separation that is often enacted still, and never without pain. In this case the pain is all the greater because Miriam thinks she is shut out from a place in the councils of the nation to which her great gifts entitle her. Under this jealous feeling her love almost turns to hatred. She wins over the weak and showy Aaron to her faction, and threatens to break up the camp unless more regard is paid to her place and position in the

councils of the people. Such seems to have been the temptation which made Miriam chide with Moses, saying, 'Hath the Lord spoken only by Moses? Hath He not also spoken by us?' We know how God punished it. She, the most self-important woman in the camp, became a poor despised leper. God smote her in the face with a stain that turned her glory into shame, and like the proud Uzziah, she became a synonym for contempt.

Intellectual pride is rarer in women than the pride of blood, or beauty, or wealth; but it is by no means unknown to-day. We live in an age when knowledge is being freely distributed among women; and every true man rejoices in this. God gave women brains—to use them. Would that they used them more! Nevertheless, let woman take care lest this tree of knowledge mean a fruit of evil as well as good. There are not a few women to-day who are too proud to become disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a mark of a small mind to be a Christian. An intellectual girl can only decently be a *Buddhist*, or a *Christian Scientist*, or a *Psychist*, or some other 'ist' nowadays.

It would be very amusing were it not also so sad. For the Christ stands at the door of the poor self-important soul and knocks; but alas! His knock is unheard. That soul is too busy listening to the knocks of Madame Blavatsky, or Mrs. Baker Eddy, or Herbert Spencer, or Emil Reich, or other newer prophets with strange and unfamiliar names out of the mysterious East, ever to listen to One so simple and unintellectual as the Lord Jesus Christ!

What is the best remedy for self-importance? A twofold remedy is needed to complete its cure. One is a view of *ourselves as we are in the sight of God.* This is hard for a self-important man or woman to get, and sometimes God has to take stern measures to bring us to see it. One of these is a vision of *death.* The face of death is often the face of God. And it is so because it brings a man to his knees, because it smites him to the dust, and shows him how poor and fragile are all his earthly props.

There is a story told of Knox that, after one of his stormy interviews with Mary, he

was ordered into the next chamber 'to await her pleasure.' There an hour he stood in the midst of lords and ladies, 'as one whom men had never seen.' Did he mind it? Not a whit! He sauntered up to a group of gorgeous, self-important ladies, and thus addressed them: 'Fair ladies, how pleasing were this life of yours if it should ever abide, and then in the end we might pass to heaven with all this gay gear! But fie upon that knave Death, that will come whether we will or no! Then, when he hath laid on his arrest, foul worms will be busy with this flesh, be it never so fair, and the silly soul, I fear, shall be so feeble that it can carry with it neither gold nor garnishing, pearl nor precious stone!' What a striking message to these self-important women, and how true still! Yes, as Tennyson puts it in *Aylmer's Field*:

'Dust are our frames and gilded dust our pride.'

But there is a better way to be poor in spirit than the vision of death. It is the vision of our *Lord Jesus Christ.* You remember that this was how Isaiah was cured of his vanity and pride. 'In the year that Uzziah

died, I saw *also* the Lord.' Note that word *also*. If he had not been cured of his self-importance by that tragic event he might. What a transformation of earthly glory into shame! 'Fifty years of royalty, and then a lazar-house!' But that was not all. I saw *also* the Lord. From the preparatory school of the *vision of death*, he passed into the graduating class of the *vision of God*. Along with the pettiness of earthly glory he saw the beauty that is not of earth, the grandeur that is unsullied, ineffable. With that, self fell shattered for ever from the throne of his heart. 'Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the true King, the Lord of Hosts.'

Perhaps the most impressive experience I have ever had of Nature's grandeur was the moment when I stood on 'the Rock of Ages' beneath the great falls of Niagara. As I looked up at the white living curtain falling almost on my head, and listened to the roar of many waters, I became quite breathless. The first thought that could find entrance to the mind was that of my insignificance. Thus was it when

Isaiah saw God; and thus when you and I see Him. Thus most of all when we see Him in Christ, in the glory of the Cross, in the splendour of His self-abnegation there. To see that is to have self pass 'in music out of sight.' We come to say with Watts :

> 'Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
> Save in the death of Christ my God.'

'God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.'

XI

THE WOMAN OF SACRIFICE

'And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies.'—JUDGES xi. 36.

THERE is no quality for which woman is so supreme as that of sacrifice. Man may have strength and even intellect in a degree to which his sister can but seldom attain, but in her power to give herself to the cause or person she loves, she far out-distances her brother. Woman's life is a synonym for sacrifice.

Of this, Jephthah's daughter is *the* Bible type. There are, of course, many others who give evidence of it in their lives: Hannah and Ruth and Esther in the Old Testament, Dorcas and the two Marys in the New. But Jephthah's daughter transcends all these. She is the very incarnation of sacrifice. This indeed is her one title to

fame. She had no gifts, like the other great women of the Bible. Her very name is forgotten. By the simple title of Jephthah's daughter will she be known to men. No; but she had what was better than talents. She gave what was nobler than gifts. She gave herself. She was in a real sense the great forerunner of Christ, the first to live out the truth for which He came to die—'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.'

The father of this noble maiden was a fierce chieftain in the uplands of Gilead. He had a clouded birth, and his half-brethren cast him out of the home as unworthy to bear their honoured name. The slight seems to have rankled in his breast. He resolved to be, in common phrase, 'upsides with them.' This his rude valour soon accomplished. He gathered round him a band as fierce as himself, and soon became the terror of all. Yet he was religious too—after a sort. He believed in a God created out of his own ideals, powerful, revengeful, demanding his pound of flesh to the last drop of blood.

The one tender spot in the man was his love for his daughter. She was his only child. On her he lavished all the love of his great nature, seeking no rival in her affections. Nor can we wonder. Her love was so beautiful, absolute in devotion and trust. She led about the great strong man as the child leads the lion in prophetic picture.

Meanwhile the great crisis of Jephthah's life had come. The Israelites were in sore straits from the children of Ammon, who bitterly oppressed them. They needed a leader to unite their arms and lead them on to victory. At this juncture some one suggested Jephthah. His name was hailed with acclamation as a happy thought. An embassy was sent, offering him the post. It was a great honour to the despised 'illegitimate.' He was now more than 'equal' to his scornful brethren. But the prized post turns out, like many another, no easy one to hold, and he grew strangely distrustful of himself. A great battle was looming ahead. Jephthah knew it was the crisis of his fortunes. In this condition of nervous dread he has recourse to prayer, and rightly so; but unfortunately not in the right spirit.

Instead of waiting on God, he attempts to strike a bargain with Him. 'If Thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hand, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.'

There is no doubt Jephthah contemplated the possibility of a human sacrifice in this vow. The words '*to meet me*' may indeed cover anything living, but they best apply to a rational being, and at least included such. Human sacrifices were common in that age—'the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul'—and Jephthah must have contemplated even this last dreadful sacrifice, though no doubt he fervently hoped God would not demand it. He is in despair at the moment, and feels he must offer anything and everything, even his only child, for victory.

You see the wickedness of his vow. It was just the old temptation of 'success'—the temptation that overmastered Napoleon when he sacrificed even Josephine to the building an Imperial house. 'Lord, give

me success at any cost—wife, child, conscience, anything, so I have success.'

God sometimes answers that prayer as we ask it, and punishes us through its answer. Success we get, but it proves an apple of Sodom crumbling to ashes in our mouth. So was it now. When next we see Jephthah he is coming home in triumph. The Ammonites are scattered to every wind. Cheers greet the conqueror on every hand; but the conqueror himself thinks not of these. What is it thus blanches his cheek and fevers his eye as he nears the smiling fields of Gilead? It is the memory of his vow! Would he had not made it; but surely God will not be so cruel as to take him at his word! If only these shoutings would cease, and he safe within his gate before his darling knows. Alas, it may not be. Who is this that, with timbrel and dance, comes laughing along to meet his approach? Who should it be but his own, his only child? 'And it came to pass when he saw her that he rent his clothes and said, Alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low.'

And now it is that the nobleness of our heroine comes out. At once, the insight

of love tells her what he has done. He has vowed unto the Lord. He cannot go back. Will she then go back? Will she make it harder with cries and tears? No; with enthusiastic devotion and high-spirited patriotism she accepts his will and falls in with his cruel behest. Nay, more, with simple faith she agrees to his grim creed, and believes her blood was needed to win the victory. 'Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth, *forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance over thine enemies.*'

One thing alone she asks. There is one she loves more dearly even than a father. That love she can never now enjoy. She can never be a wife or mother in Israel. She must die in the first sweet flush of maidenhood. To bid 'good-bye' to that lover and prepare her soul for the last dread ordeal, she craves two months' respite among the hills, 'to bewail her virginity.' The boon was willingly given. I dare say the heart-broken father would have been glad if she had never returned. But return she did, 'at the end of two months, to her father.'

I do not doubt that by these words is meant that he literally kept his vow. A kindlier interpretation has been suggested, due to the reference to her 'virginity'—that the vow was softened into making her a kind of Old Testament nun. For my part, I have no doubt the vow was fulfilled as it was made. Human sacrifices, as I have said, were not the horror then that they are to us. No doubt they had been forbidden by the Levitical code; but admitting that this had been promulgated then, there seems little doubt that the time of the Judges was a period of terrible barbarity and ignorance, though no doubt a time of great strength and promise as well. It has been truly called 'Israel's Iron Age.'

As to that last tragic scene I have no word to say. Let us rather draw a veil over the picture, saying as we do so, 'Alas, Religion, what crimes have been done in thy name! Men have done in the name of God what they had never dared in the devil's.' Satan is never so deadly as when 'transformed into an angel of light.' Let us, as John Morley says, not only try to do the good, but try 'to find out what the good is—which is harder.'

While we deplore Jephthah's terrible mistake, let us not forget there are fathers, ay, and even mothers, who in this Christian year of grace are doing deeds of cruelty deliberately to their helpless offspring. Sad, sad it is that we should need a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. I was reading one of their reports the other day—a poor little girl done to death by a mother, yes, a mother and step-father. Her wails could be heard every night. At last one night there was *silence*. The weary battle of the poor little bleeding thing was over! A bruised little corpse was all that was left!

> 'They look up with pale and sunken faces,
> And their look is dread to see.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
> Than the strong man in his wrath!'

But let us turn from the sad side of the story to its beautiful and poetic side—the spirit of her who, by her meek submission and noble sacrifice, turned a tale of horror into a favourite theme of 'the songs of the daughters of Israel.' There are three things about Jephthah's daughter that to my mind

make hers a perfect sacrifice, and these three gather round the great words, *Duty*, *Love*, and *Life*.

I. Jephthah's daughter found her sacrifice *in the path of duty*. In no Quixotic fashion did she go out seeking for some great thing to do. No, her sacrifice met her in the path of parental obedience. It was her duty to submit. Nay, she had no other choice. The only question was, how was she to do that duty?

Seek your sacrifices in the path of duty. 'The trivial round, the common task, will furnish all you need to ask—*room to deny yourself*.' It is a great mistake when a woman thinks she must leave her home to make a sacrifice for God. On the contrary, a woman's sacrifice is usually in the home. No doubt there may come calls to go out to foreign lands to serve humanity. That is quite a different matter. But that we should leave our homes simply to make a sacrifice, is a view of God as poor and unworthy as Jephthah's himself. God wants no useless sacrifices. Therefore do not go out to meet sacrifice. Let sacrifice come to meet you. It will come soon enough.

It was so with Jephthah's daughter. She did not make the sacrifice for herself. It found her and called her. Then, and only then, she answered, 'Here am I, take me.'

II. Once more, her sacrifice was perfect because she *gave it in the spirit of perfect love.* The love was twofold—to her father, and still more to her country.

This is the view Tennyson takes in his beautiful picture of her in the *Dream of Fair Women.*

In this splendid pageant of the illustrious women of history, the most lovely picture of all is this humble Jewish girl. Upon her breast the poet still sees the mark of the spear-wound; upon her face the gaze of tragic sorrow. Yet, when he would commiserate her, she refuses the proffered pity:

> '"Heaven heads the count of crimes
> With that wild oath."'

But no, she wishes, needs no such pity. What matter her poor life be sacrificed if her country be free?

> '"It comforts me in this one thought to dwell,
> That I subdued me to my father's will;
> Because the kiss he gave me, ere I fell,
> Sweetens the spirit still.

"Moreover it is written that my race
Hew'd Ammon, hip and thigh, from Aroer
On Arnon unto Minneth." Here her face
Glow'd, as I look'd at her.

She lock'd her lips: she left me where I stood:
"Glory to God," she sang, and past afar,
Thridding the sombre boskage of the wood,
Toward the morning-star.'

A beautiful picture! And it brings before us that which infused her whole sacrifice and made the dark deed beautiful—its spirit *of perfect love*. 'She hath wrought a good work,' said Jesus of Mary, when she 'brake the box' upon His feet. The word 'good,' says Professor Bruce, means beautiful. 'She hath wrought a beautiful work.' What love does is always beautiful. Jephthah's vow was wicked; the carrying out of it was horrible; but the love of his daughter transfigured it, as the golden sunlight takes up a dark cloud and changes it into a chariot of fire. Love turned the blackest deed in Israel's early history into a theme for 'the songs of the daughters of Israel.'

Let any true love fill your heart, the love of man, of country, or, best of all, of Christ, and it too will make your life beautiful.

You may have little to give; no alabaster of precious ointment to break at the Master's feet. Your sacrifice may lie in the narrow circle of household duty. But if it is the offering of a life consecrated by love, it too will become beautiful. Love makes all things beautiful.

III. Lastly, this maiden's sacrifice *was the gift of a life.* She did not shrink at the shedding of her heart's blood. She gave her all. In that it was a foreshadowing, faint but real, of 'Him who laid down His life for the sheep.' And from that point of view there is a striking coincidence, if it was nothing more, between the last scenes of His sacrifice and of hers. I have not seen it mentioned by any writer, but it seems to me so striking as to deserve notice.

There is a beautifully poetic touch in the narrative, where it is said of Jephthah's daughter that she begged two months' respite that she might bewail her early death '*on the mountains.*' Fancy paints her as she would steal out from her father's home in the early dawn, and, far up among the lonely hills, nerve her soul for the last dread

ordeal, by communion with God. 'All great inspiration,' says Ruskin, 'comes from the hills.' 'I will lift mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh mine aid.' Not among the low valleys, with their vulgar curiosity and intolerable sympathy, but

> 'Up to the hills
> Where the torrent fills
> With storms of the Winter's brewing,
> Close in the clasp
> Of Nature's grasp,
> There tell thy heart's undoing.'

Now there is a striking coincidence between this and our Saviour, as He drew near the hour of His great Passion. St. John tells us that during these last few weeks He withdrew to Bethany beyond Jordan. This is just what was known in Old Testament times as the land of Gilead. Knowing our Lord's love for retirement among the hills for prayer, can we doubt that He would often be up in these solitudes, steeling His soul for the last dread ordeal of the Cross. So that we have the striking coincidence, that during the time our Lord was preparing for the Cross, He was treading the same scenes as had once been consecrated by Jephthah's

daughter as she prepared her soul for her great sacrifice.

Is it an idle fancy to suppose that He must have often thought of her who bent her will to a foolish father, and that it comforted and strengthened Him as He prepared to yield His to a Father who could not err? Certainly it is at least a striking coincidence that these hills of Gilead should thus have witnessed the preparation hours of the great sacrifice of the Old Testament and the sublime sacrifice of the New.

Brethren, what of this element of sacrifice is there in your life or mine? Alas, is it not the case that the word has almost dropped out of the vocabulary of the modern Church? As one has said, 'We are living in limp and luxurious days, and the ancient spirit of devotion and sacrifice is sadly to seek.' 'There is no blood upon your breasts,' says Dr. Whyte to the modern Church. And therefore it is that you have doubts and indifference, and a spirit of deadly dulness creeps over all. For not until your life is dyed red with the blood of sacrifice will you know what Christ is and the life in Christ. He came Himself, 'not

by water only, but by water and blood,' and not until there is blood-letting in your life will it know anything of the joy that Christ can give.

Open then your hearts to the experience of sacrifice. And to do so, fall in love with Christ. Get a vision of the beauty of His great sacrifice. Open your eyes to the splendour of the Cross. Then the springs of love and life will be unsealed. Then you will understand the joy of sacrifice. Then you will enter into the meaning of one, a modern woman of sacrifice, to whom that dark word spelt nothing but ineffable joy :

> 'Take my life, and let it be
> Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
> Take my moments and my days,
> Let them flow in ceaseless praise.'

'For he that loveth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for My sake, shall find it.'

XII

THE FRIVOLOUS GIRL

'It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.'—Exodus xxxii. 18.

There is a tone of deep disappointment discernible in these words of Moses. The man of God is descending with his favourite Joshua from the sacred mount. For forty days he has held high communion with the eternal. You can imagine how deeply earnest the talk of the two would be, as the elder man tells the other of his wondrous experiences.

Suddenly in the midst of this comes the noise from the camp far off in the valley below. To the earnest spirit of Joshua that noise can only betoken one thing—the people are in conflict with the enemies of Jehovah. 'There is a sound of war in the camp,' he cries. But the ears of Moses are taught by a truer experience. Would that

it were the noise of battle! Even were it the cry of the overcome, it would at least show they were taking a worthy conception of their mission. But it is not so. It is only the sound of revelry—dancing and laughing and singing. And Moses said, 'It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.'

Now these words have suggested to me the topic on which I want to speak to you for a little now—*the frivolous spirit in our modern life.* My application will specially be to our womanhood; but, of course, I do not mean to suggest that frivolity is by any means confined to women. On the contrary, it is as prevalent among men, especially among our working-classes. Carelessness is one of the crying evils of our time. What Moses said of Israel long ago may be said of large masses of our people to-day. There is heard in our modern life too little of the shout of mastery, yes, even too little of the cry of the overcome. There is heard only the noise of them that dance and sing.

Not, of course, that there is anything

wrong in these things in themselves. We must not turn our plea for seriousness into an apology for gloom. In our criticism of the light mind we must not make the mistake of condemning the light heart. Lightness of mind is one thing: lightness of heart quite another. 'A merry heart is a continual feast': a light mind the worst of evils. Weight is an advantage in some things; in others a most serious drawback. We like our sails to be light; we want our keels to be weighty. A light heart is the silken sail that speeds the ship of life on to victory; but when the storm comes down, we rely on the well-weighted keel to stand against the blast.

There are those who quarrel with laughter. We do not admire them, nor would we live with them. Life is sober enough. Moments for tears are too frequent to despise laughter. The Church has too often frowned on amusement and made Christ a synonym for 'Don't.' The Master has no sympathy with such a caricature of His spirit. His was the geniality that loved the children and watched them at their play; that went to the marriage and tarried for its feast; that gathered the

gay lilies, and made them a text of faith; that welcomed the spikenard, and did not grudge its waste.

Christ was a genial Christ, and yet He was still more a serious Christ. He would have been at one with Moses in his disappointment here. He is at one with him still when He listens to the music of your life and mine, and is constrained to say of it, 'How is it I hear no shout of mastery, no cry of need? It is only, alas! the noise of them that sing that I hear.'

For what is the temper of frivolity? Is it not just *the spirit that has no conflict in it.* I remember a striking mediæval picture entitled 'The Game of Life.' It pictured a man playing a game of chess with the devil. The stake was for his life. A heart of gold lying on the table symbolled that. On the left side was the great adversary looking down with a leer of cynic triumph. His antagonist is in difficulty. Already it is check! Soon it will be checkmate! But the curious thing is that the human player seems to have little or no consciousness of the tremendous issue at stake. He has a look of careless indifference as his

hand shifts the piece. It is only a game, 'the game of life.' Above, shining out of the gloom, is the face of the Man of Sorrows, with a look of infinite mourning upon it. 'Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life.'

Ah! that game is being played by too many to-day in a similar spirit. There are thousands and millions of souls all over our world to-day that never seem to awake to the tremendous issues of life. There is in them no shout of mastery, no cry of the overcome. There is only the noise of play.

Were my subject unrestricted I might easily show how true this is of everything to-day. I might, for example, show you an illustration of it in the immense increase of amusements in our age. At a recent international football match there were present no less than one hundred and twenty thousand people, and this at a time when the most disastrous coal strike in the history of the land was taking place. I might point to the vast increase in our theatres and music-halls; to the degradation of the drama from serious plays to the lightest of opera-bouffe. I might point to

the frivolity of our present-day literature, to the increase of fiction-reading, and to the change of our very magazines from the serious to the gay, the flippant, and often the vulgar. Lastly, I might show you the spirit at work in our religious life, in our sapping of our congregations by week-ends and Sunday recreations, and in the cheapening of what worship is left into Pleasant Sunday Afternoons and cinematograph entertainments, with an 'address' attached as a sop to Cerberus. I do not say that all these things are wrong in themselves, I am simply pointing to them as a symptom—the symptom of a widespread disease in our modern life, its lack of serious purpose, its want of conflict, its absence of the 'shout for mastery' or 'the cry of need,' its plenitude of 'the noise of them that sing.'

But my subject is not 'the Frivolity of Our Age,' my subject is 'the Frivolous Woman of our Age.' Is she worse than her brothers in this respect? Is woman more frivolous than man? I would not like to say so. In the lower classes especially, I think men are really more frivolous than

women. I read of hundreds of thousands of men going to a football match, but I seldom see many women of that class there. No doubt, when they are young, they love a little fun, but who is the worse, be he man or woman, for that? When, however, they settle down into housewives, with homes of their own, the women of the working-classes strike me as being, on the whole, 'sober-minded keepers at home,' examples to their often giddy and pleasure-loving, and even drunken husbands.

Among the higher classes of society, however, and especially the highest of all, truth compels me to say that this is no longer so. There woman competes with man in frivolity, and often seems to bear away the palm. Principal G. A. Smith, in his commentary on Isaiah, has a striking chapter entitled 'Isaiah to Women.' He points out that Isaiah's great charge against the women of Jerusalem corresponds in all essentials with that of the prophet Amos, and of St. Paul and the New Testament generally. It is a charge of *frivolity*, or, as the Bible calls it, '*carelessness*.' 'Rise up,' he says, 'ye careless daughters. Tremble, ye women that are

at ease. Be troubled, ye careless ones.' 'The besetting sin of women,' as he dins into them, 'is ease; an ignorant and unthinking contentment with things as they are; thoughtlessness with regard to the deeper mysteries of life; disbelief in the possibility of change.'

And this frivolity is apt to lead to cruelty, and indifference to all but itself and its own pleasing. For thoughtlessness, 'when joined to luxury or beauty, plays with cruel weapons. It means greed, arrogance, indifference to suffering, wantonness, pride of conquest, dissimulation in love, and revenge for little slights; and there is no waste, unkind sport, insolence, brutality, or hysterical violence to which it will not lead.'

These are strong words; but history proves they are true. When the Bible would paint for us the apotheosis of frivolous cruelty, it gives us, not a Nero fiddling when Rome was burning, but a bright and beautiful girl carrying in her arms the blood-stained head of the noblest prophet of God!

There is a picture in Rome of Salome as she carries her grim trophy to her mother. When I first looked at that picture I confess

I was surprised and disappointed. My idea of Salome would have been that of a dark, proud, revengeful beauty. Instead of that, the artist had painted a lovely laughing girl, looking down with a roguish smile on the 'charger' as the daintiest dish to set before a queen. It seemed trifling. But as I looked longer, I felt the artist was right. It was frivolity in Salome, married to revenge in Herodias, that led to that vile deed. And that is what frivolity always ends in, if you keep it long enough. Its gambols are like the gambols of a tiger-kitten, that mature into the ferocity of a beast of prey.

What is the cure of frivolity? I answer, *a great experience.* Let an experience truly noble be allowed to enter the soul, and the frivolous spirit takes wings and flies away.

There are three great experiences in life that can transfigure a frivolous girl into a woman of soul. One is the experience of *love,* another the experience of *death,* a third the experience of *Christ.*

True love, when it enters the heart, can change a frivolous butterfly into a woman of real depth of soul.

You have an example of that in Sarai, the wife of Abraham and mother of the chosen race. You might think me unjust if I called her the 'frivolous woman of the Old Testament.' How steadfast she was to Abraham all through! What things she dared for him! Yes; and yet in spite of that she was a frivolous woman too. That 'laugh' with which she greeted the angel's promise of a son is characteristic of her nature all through. Very differently did the Divine Mother receive the tidings of a far more marvellous annunciation. She 'magnified the Lord, and her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour.' But Sarai laughed a weak and silly laugh, and then denied it as quickly when the angel reprimanded her for her foolishness.

And with that frivolous laugh all her former, and some of her later conduct, agreed. It was surely in keeping with that laugh that she was able to flirt so successfully with the gallants of Egypt as an unmarried woman. For though that infamous suggestion came from Abram, I do not see how any but a very frivolous woman could have successfully carried it out.

It was quite in keeping, too, with that laugh that she should have used poor Hagar as she did; that she should first have made her a tool to achieve her baffled desire for a child; and then that she should cast her out to die in the desert when that tool was no longer necessary. Yes, in Sarai frivolity and cruelty were twin sisters, as they too often are in woman's heart.

Yet, in spite of all, Sarai was steadfast too. She was steadfast in her love to Abraham, right through all his sins and her follies. You may say, How can a character be at once frivolous and steadfast? I reply, in words that Dr. Denney once used to me in reference to some of the rash judgments of higher criticism, 'There is nothing more consistent than an idea: there is nothing less consistent than a character.' That is the originality of the Bible. What Shakespeare only dimly grasped in the imagination, the Bible proclaims on the housetop in Sarai, the mother of the faithful, a woman frivolous, and yet withal loving; careless on the surface of her being, and yet firm as a rock in the hidden depths beneath.

But the Bible teaches more. It shows us that when true love enters the soul, the frivolous spirit passes out. Thus we see how Sarai improves under the touch of motherhood. All her frivolity passed away when she cradled Isaac in her loving arms. And it is often so. Give a frivolous girl a baby, and you will see her blossom into a true woman.

The Jews have a tradition that Sarai died of the shock of seeing her Isaac carried away to be sacrificed on Mount Moriah. I can well believe it. She said no word that day. She called Abraham 'lord' even on that dark morning. But as her darling went out of the tent, as it seemed for ever, her heart died within her. 'She never smiled again.' Isaac mourned her with a bitter mourning, and well he might. Taking her all in all, we see in her, in these latter days, a loving mother and a loyal wife.

'Love took up the harp of life and smote on all the chords with might,
Smote the chord of self, which trembling passed in music out of sight.'

Another experience which cures the frivolous temper is the *vision of death*. One of

the noblest women of modern times was converted from a frivolous life by seeing from her window a gay gallant, who was riding up to her house to meet her, suddenly fall dead from his horse. The face of death, as I have said elsewhere, is often the first lineaments of the face of God. To see it touch either ourselves or those we love is to feel how shallow are the sources of happiness which the merely frivolous heart draws from; how quickly bankrupt becomes the frivolous conception of life.

There is a striking picture in Berlin entitled 'What is your Life?' It paints before you Death, leading behind him his train of Life's Captives. The young and old are there; the new-born child and the old man. The rich and poor are there; kings and queens in royal robe, and the beggar in his gaberdine. But the most striking thing in the picture is two figures in the foreground on either side of the grim skeleton. One of these is an old man with sorrow-furrowed face and weary eyes. He is kneeling before Death in suppliant attitude, with clasped hands, pleading with him evidently to take him a captive. Life has no more charms for him.

But Death will have none of him. He has his grasp on a better prey. Turning away from the old man, he is clutching with his bony fingers a sweet young girl. She is dressed as a bride, and her broken-hearted husband is struggling fiercely to get her out of the clutch of Death. But all in vain; Death will not be denied. As you look at it you are reminded of the words, 'What is your Life? A vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then——?' It is a vision such as this that has often cured the frivolous soul of its frivolity.

But the best cure of all is the *experience of Christ*, the vision of His earnest, thoughtful view of life. Genial as He ever was, there is nothing of the *boulevard* theory of existence in Him. Even in His twelfth year that great word '*must*'—I must—had appeared with regnant power in His consciousness, and right on to the end it kept ringing out with solemn emphasis, until at last it led Him to a Cross. 'The Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be crucified.'

Get that mind into you, my brothers, my sisters. By a mystic faith you can become

one with Christ, one with His earnest spirit. 'I, yet not I, but Christ in me.' Then life will become to you not less glad but more deep. The light heart will remain, nay, it will grow lighter, but the light mind will pass away; and as God listens far off from the heights of heaven to the music of your life, He will be able to say of it as Moses said of Israel long ago, but in a deeper, grander sense, 'It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that *sing* do I hear.' 'For they sing a new song, even praise unto their God'—the song of Moses and the Lamb.

XIII

THE FACTORY GIRL

'Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.'—Matt. xxiv. 41.

It has been truly said that the beauty and pathos of 'The Angelus,' the well-known picture by the French artist, depends not so much on itself as on the story you read into it. That picture represents, as you are all aware, two French peasants, man and woman, in the fields. They are bending down to the ground, apparently doing nothing more remarkable than searching for something there. Than such a scene nothing could be more commonplace. You can see it any day in the fields.

But when you are told that they are engaged in prayer; that the angelus from the neighbouring convent has begun to sound its call to evening worship, and that this man and woman are responding to it ere, their weary labour done, they go home to

their well-earned rest, somehow a new meaning comes into the picture. The shadows of evening become brimful with holy quiet. The beauty and pathos of human labour, the deep and tender love that may gather round the lowliest lot, come into view, and a feeling akin to that *The Cottar's Saturday Night* inspires, steals upon the mind.

It is something of the same feeling that our Lord strikes out in this parable-picture when He says, 'Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.' Two women grinding at a mill —nothing could be more commonplace than such a sight in Palestine either in Christ's day or ours. It was the peasant woman's ordinary lot, her accustomed share of the daily task. Grinding at a mill! What a poor existence! But a new meaning, a new beauty, a new dignity immediately comes into that lowly life when our Lord adds, 'The one shall be taken, and the other left.' The reference is to the coming of the Son of Man, His second coming to judgment and glory, and the results which that coming shall have as a revelation of character and destiny. Then, the one shall be

taken to honour and glory and immortality, while the other shall be left unhonoured and unblest. The one shall find her lowly labour to be the path that leads to true enrichment of soul, the other shall make of it a mere treadmill of existence, the grinding down not of meal only but of heart, the deterioration and degradation of all the finest emotions and aspirations; at the last sinking out of touch of Christ and immortality altogether. 'Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.'

Let us look more closely at the type of woman Christ brings before us here. She comes before us in striking contrast to her sister of last Sabbath. How dull and commonplace is her lot to outward seeming as compared with the other! She lives her lowly life in no glamour of wealth and pleasure. From week to week, from year to year, she goes on in a monotonous routine of hard and irksome labour. Her long hours provide little opportunity for amusement, and what does come is too often of the most degrading kind. Her position to-day in our Western world,

though perhaps less soiling to the hands, is not less, but more contracting to the soul than that of her Eastern sister. Our Lord's woman 'grinding at the mill' had at least the advantage of the broad and open blue of God's heaven, and the green of God's fields, and the laughter of little children. Hers was a life in the open air, and, save for her fellow-worker, there was no one near to poison the atmosphere and pollute the soul. But the modern factory girl lives her life, crowded to the hundred, and even the thousand, in some huge prison-house, with the pandemonium of half a hundred wheels tearing round on every side, and the intercourse of the good, the bad, the indifferent beating in upon her soul on every hand. What chance has she to live a life above her fellows? Her character and destiny seem as much determined for her as the pattern of the web she is grinding out hour after hour from her ceaseless loom. She is only a factory girl, and nothing more.

Is it so? I can tell you something different! I was not brought up in the east end of a great manufacturing city for nothing! I was not the son of a minister there for

nothing! I know what I am speaking of, and I can tell you there are webs of life spun there as fine as the silk ones of a rich man's palace. I once read a book about that great and squalid wilderness. It was called, I think, *Jean*, and it was all about 'the factory girl.' The picture it gave of her life was anything but flattering. The 'east end' was truly 'a city of dreadful night' to this observer. Her coarseness, her vulgarity, her monotonous existence, ending inevitably in her sin and shame, her sorrow and death—this was 'the factory girl' as the author of *Jean* had seen her.

I read that book and said to myself, 'Wrong, all wrong!' The true painter of the poor, the Charles Dickens or Mrs. Gaskell, would have mixed the colours more wittingly than this. The colour is all too dark, and it is so just because the point of view is so external. You have never truly known the factory girl. You have only seen the long black streets in which she lives. You have only stood at the 'close-mouth' and listened to the coarse talk and loud laugh of her baser sisters. If you will enter these homes in which she dwells, you will find characters

as fine and heroisms as beautiful, yes, and spots of sunshine as glad, as any in our English land.

Here, for example, is one who supports a widowed and aged mother, with cheerful, uncomplaining toil. When the day's work is done, she hurries home to prepare her evening meal. Though she has been at the factory since six or seven in the morning, she is as ready to do the cooking and cleaning for her bed-ridden mother as if that were her whole work. Nor is her interest in life finished when tea is over. Very often you will see her hurry off to some meeting in her church, and when Sunday comes she will be in her place in the choir as neat and clean as if this were her whole vocation. No wonder if she is a little pale and slender. No wonder if, with her lack of proper food, she too often gives way to the great enemy of her class—consumption. While she lives, she lives the life of a kindly and pure womanhood, and when she lies down to die, she does so with the patience and the hope of a true Christian.

You may say my picture is ideal. The ones you have seen are of a very different

stamp. I grant you the picture is by no means the whole truth. There is another factory girl as different from this one as night is from day; one as coarse as she is refined, as brazen as she is modest, as careless as she is earnest. Yes, and like the wheat and the tares, the two may grow side by side. Breathing the same air, they may yet produce fruit the most opposite. Hammered on the same anvil of circumstance, they may differ from each other by the 'whole diameter of being.' 'Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.'

I. What, then, does the factory girl teach us? This surely first of all, *the primacy of the soul as the great determining factor of human life.* These two women grinding together at the one mill, day by day, year by year, yet evolving a life differing the one from the other with a distinction growing vaster and ever more vast, what do they teach us but the old truth rung out by Ezekiel long ago, but never more needed than it is to-day: the truth of the absolute monarchy of the soul in its sovereignty over circumstance? 'All

souls are mine, saith the Lord. . . . As the soul of the father is mine, so the soul of the child is mine. The soul that sinneth it shall die.' Yes, and the soul that believeth it shall live.

That is not a favourite doctrine to-day. In these times of socialism 'the individual withers, and the state is more and more.' Nevertheless it is true doctrine, and it would be all the better if men believed it and acted on it more. As Henley says:

> 'I am the captain of my fate,
> I am the master of my soul.'

In these days of legislative remedies for every ill that flesh and spirit can contract, we are too apt to forget the primacy of the soul. We cry for social reform, social salvation, social betterment. All good in their way, but too apt to make us forget the old commonplace, as we call it, that 'the soul of all improvement is the improvement of the soul.' Yet it is just this commonplace Jesus came to teach. It was for the infinite worth of the soul He lived and died. It was on its infinite significance He never wearied dwelling. And nowhere perhaps does He put that infinite significance with more solemn

emphasis than here, where He paints before us two souls pursuing their path of life identical from the cradle to the grave, yet ending the one in the stars and the other in mill-dust. Yes, He would say to you (and would that some of you would let His words ring with conviction and conversion down into the deep recesses of your moral being), yes, it is the soul that counts. It is the treadmill of the soul that kills, not the treadmill of the body. There are poor shrivelled bodies that creep out their whole existence in one narrow prison-yard of circumstance while their souls soar like the bird into the blue of heaven's noblest thoughts; and there are bodies that are carried on every wing that wealth can afford while their poor pedestrian souls crawl like a worm on the earth all their days.

Your work may seem poor and trivial. It may be but a very drudgery of existence, and at times you may cry, What beauty, what glory can I bring into this daily treadmill? Ah! it need not be so. Through Christ it shall not be so. Bring His love into that treadmill, and He will transfigure its steps into a golden ladder leading up to the very throne of God.

It is said that one of the loveliest melodies

in one of the noblest of Beethoven's compositions, the Pastoral Symphony I think, was built up out of a rude rustic rhythm that was wafted one night to the great composer's ears as he lay in bed in a country inn. A passing wayfarer of the night was humming to himself a few notes of an unfinished folk-song as he went on his homeward path. The rhythm struck the composer. He noted it straightway in his note-book. He bent his mind over it with the laborious patience which was so characteristic of his genius. He turned it one way and another. He shot it through with new harmonies and strange discords. He varied it in a hundred different ways, until at last the old country tune became glorified into something altogether wonderful. It was the old and yet infinitely, gloriously new. The dull chrysalis, as one said of his variations generally, became a beautiful butterfly. 'It was all changed, and yet one knew it to be the same creature in spite of the change.'[1] All had been made new by the intermingling with it of the melodies of the master.

[1] Mr. Danreuther in an article on Beethoven in *Macmillan's Magazine*.

When into the dull monotone of life's tune, whatever that may be, we bring the harmonies of the Master of Life's music, then indeed all is made new.

II. Now that brings me to the second great lesson which we learn from the factory girl. *If it is the soul that makes life beautiful, it is Christ makes beautiful the soul.* For you will notice, the distinction between these two girls takes place *at the coming of the Son of Man.* Surely that teaches us that these two characters thus distinguished have been fixed in relation to Him. We know it is so. Characters are not fixed things at first. The impression on the wax is not always rigid. The character of an infant, what is that? Why, it seems absurd to speak of such a thing. Like a lump of clay, you can mould it to anything. But as the years go on, we tend to get fixed in our habits and desires and dispositions. Each new decision fixes that rigidity. Each temptation yielded to or conquered, each thought cherished or rejected, all go to form part of the influences that thus mould our life. They enter into our spiritual manhood like food into the blood, like the

swinging blows of the hammer into the blacksmith's arm; and so our life builds around us, like the fabled tower of brass of the hapless princess, what is going to be either our palace or our prison.

And what our text teaches us here is this: these decisions are all made, consciously or unconsciously, in relation to Jesus Christ. I say consciously or unconsciously, for you may not be conscious that Christ is in them. Nevertheless He is there. For what is Christ to you? He is just the ideal of the best you can live. Christ comes to your soul whenever it is moved to the highest things. Whenever what is noblest in you calls you and says, 'Follow me,' that is Christ to you. You may not be aware that Christ is there. The righteous in Christ's parable of judgment had to say, 'Lord, when saw we *Thee*?' They never knew they were helping Jesus when they did these kind deeds. But it was so. Inasmuch as they did it to the poor and needy, they did it unto Him.

Christ Himself recognised that truth when He said, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.'

Paul recognised it when he said, 'They drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them, and that Rock was Christ'—speaking of the Church in the wilderness. There is an eternal Christ, and when a man is following the highest in his life, he is following that Christ.

But while I thus believe in an eternal Christ who comes to every soul, whether it knows the historic Christ or no, it is true that for us this Christ has been made real in a far more close and tender way, and for us, therefore, there is the greater privilege and responsibility. None of you need say you have not the possibility of knowing Christ. Day by day in your commonest labour He may be with you. As you stand at the loom in the rushing noise of the machinery, you have only to lift your heart for a moment and straightway He is with you; with you to strengthen and to cheer, with you to help in every time of need, 'closer than breathing, nearer than hands or feet.'

That is what Christ may be to you, and that is how He becomes the touchstone of character and destiny. That is how the question of all questions for you is this,

'What think ye of Christ?' What answer have you given to that question? Have you given any answer to it? You must give some answer to it. To give no answer is to give the worst of all answers. It is to sink into the class of the morally indifferent, the neutral souls, to whom God will say one day in tones of indignant rejection, 'In the day thou stoodest on the other side . . . even *thou* wast as one of them.'

'One shall be taken, the other left.' In these words Christ reiterates the truth He elsewhere lays down with such solemn emphasis that at the last there will be but two classes. To the ordinary observer to-day that twofold classification seems artificial and absurd. There are not two classes, but a hundred classes. Life shows itself as a confused mass, a mixed multitude of infinite shades of character and faith. As one[1] has wittily put it, 'I know what is to become of the sheep, and I know what is to become of the goats, but what about the alpacas?' The indeterminate, nondescript souls, part sheep and part goat, who is to distinguish them? But to the eye of God there is no

[1] T. A. Selby.

difficulty. He tests every soul by His touch-stone, and has no difficulty in marking off the good from the base metal.

In a famous day of battle in Israel's history, it is told that the pursuers and pursued had mixed themselves inextricably together. No man knew friend from foe in the gathering night. But as the confused mass came seething up to the fords of Jordan, a little band of the victorious army stationed themselves there and put a question which fixed the matter beyond a doubt. The fugitive was asked to pronounce one word, 'Say now Shibboleth.' If he answered correctly he was safe. If he said 'Sibboleth' it was the last he spoke. 'Then they took him and slew him at the passages of Jordan.' The question was not superficial. For its purpose it was radical. It infallibly marked off its victim, as man of Gilead or man of Ephraim, friend or foe, life or death.

So in the great testing-place of life there is but one question God puts to you, and your answer to it is regulative of character and therefore determinative of destiny. It is the question, 'What think ye of Christ?'

XIV

THE WOMAN OF QUIET

'A sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.'—Luke x. 39.

The woman of quiet is not the woman who cannot speak. Some women are silent because they have nothing to say. Their minds are a dull blank of pictureless vacuity. No gleam of thought or emotion seems ever to play over the bosom of their stagnant souls. They are cowlike in their placidity, sheeplike in their stupidity.

Such women must be a trial to live with. They may be good housekeepers, but they are not good home-makers. They are, in truth, no home-makers at all. They have nothing to offer their husbands or brothers in the way of sympathy or counsel in times of trial, and it is when they are numerous in the homes of the poor that the public-house flourishes.

Very different is 'the woman of quiet.'

She can speak well if she chooses; but she knows the value of silence. She knows there is something rarer even than a good speaker, and that is a good listener, one whose silence is golden with sympathy, insight, and tact. And such a listener was Mary of Bethany. There are three incidents in the Gospels where she is mentioned, and from each of these we learn something characteristic, something that makes up our picture of one who is a Quietest in the best sense of that beautiful word. One is the supper scene at Bethany; *the woman of quiet under provocation.* The second is the death of Lazarus; *the woman of quiet in meditation.* The last is the love-feast at Simon's house, with its broken alabaster; *the woman of quiet in consecration.* Let us look at these scenes to-night. They are all of a piece, and bring before us one of the most attractive women of Scripture.

I. There is first the quiet of Mary *in provocation.*

I suppose we all appreciate Martha's good points. As one has said, 'An ideal woman would be a Martha before supper and a Mary during it—and after.' Yet, unless we

run away from the whole meaning of the incident, we cannot take Martha's part here and champion her against Mary. To do so would be to be wiser than Christ; for there is no doubt on which of the sisters the incidence of His commendation falls. 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.'

'Martha,' says Dr. Maclaren, 'has it all her own way now.' We are great in our insistence on the folly of the conventual and the importance of the practical ideal. Yet there never was an age surely that needed more of Mary's spirit, never a time when it would be good for more of us to sit at the feet of the Master.

I will not say this is pre-eminently the age of work. I believe men did as much work a hundred years ago. It is rather the age of hurry, the age of hustle and bustle. The noise of its machinery is clanging in all our ears. The fever of its life is throbbing in our very blood. Even those who have but little to do are confused by its tumultuous rush, while those who are 'in it' are often

swept off their feet by a congestion of occupations and engagements, so that they have 'no time almost to eat.'

Is it all so necessary? Mr. Benson in his beautiful *House of Quiet* tells of a squire who asked his bailiff as he walked round his new estate, 'What are those fields for?'

'To grow oats, sir.'

'And what do you do with the oats?'

'Feed the horses, sir.'

'And what do you want the horses for?'

'To plough the fields, sir.'

That is what much of the bustle of modern life consists of.

Even religious life is no exception. A clergyman in a city church told me not long ago that, on the evening of his week-night service, there were five meetings going on in the building at the time. How much better for these to coalesce for one hour of quiet at the feet of God!

What is the danger of all this? That while the work flourishes after a fashion, the worker withers. I once watched the looms in a great jute factory. There they were, grinding out hour by hour their toll of work. I felt like one of these, grinding out day

by day my yard of Christian work, but with no soul, no depth, no individuality—a factory loom and nothing more!

Yes, and often a *heated* loom as well. Irritable like Martha; easily put out, and wondering why; not knowing that the machine needed oil—the oil of a grace that only distils in the quiet.

How different with Mary! Without following the pros and cons in the time-worn controversy between Martha and Mary, let me just note one thing. *Mary takes no part in it.* She is silent all through, though I dare say she had a good enough case to put had she been so minded. But minded she is not. She was never much minded to speak. We have just one sentence from her in all the Gospels, and yet we have a perfect portrait. She was the woman of quiet, and if there is one place more than another where she will be quiet, it is *under provocation.*

A great gift, and specially to be commended in a woman. For women have a clever tongue, and often a sharp one. 'Woman has always the last word,' says the proverb. She might, but I doubt if she has. At least

I have known more women than men who were silent in provocation. Their quarrel was just. They suffered wrongly. But they were silent. The word that quivered in the heart was not allowed to pass the lips. It is a great gift. It was the gift of the Master Himself. As a sheep dumb before her shearers, so He opened not His mouth. 'The chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing.'

I once asked a man who had 'sat under' one of the most eloquent preachers in Scotland, what was the finest passage he had heard from his lips. 'When he said nothing,' was the reply. 'I was at a church court. A letter had come from the richest office-bearer in his church abusing the doctor for some publication, throwing up his office and leaving the church.' According to the rules of the court the letter had to be read. It was very provocative, even abusive. My friend expected a storm, but the minister only said, 'Is there any discussion on this letter?' No one ventured to speak. 'Then,' he said, 'let us pass to the next business.' 'That,' declared my friend, 'was the finest passage I ever heard from the doctor, and he

was the finest preacher I ever heard—*his magnificent silence.*'

II. We now pass to the second of Mary's silences, *the quiet of meditation.* 'Mary sat still in the house.'

A great sorrow has overshadowed the home of Bethany—the loss, not merely of a brother, but of the 'Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.' Life's shadows are bearable when the shadow of the cloud is discovered to be but 'the shadow of His wings.' But when the sorrow is accompanied by a terrible doubt, a doubt in the love or even the existence of God, sorrow's crown of sorrow is reached. This was the grief of the sisters at Bethany. Lazarus was laid in the grave, and that was hard to bear; but even harder was the thought that Jesus did not care. For they had sent Him a message—'he whom Thou *lovest* is sick'—and His only answer had been, 'This sickness is not unto death.' And he had died after all. And worse still, Jesus did not come. He did not know and He did not care.

Such was the doubt at the heart of this sorrow. Now see how Mary meets it. She

sat still. Some have blamed her. They have contrasted her 'sullen indifference' with Martha's nervous alacrity. 'The active temperament suffers better than the passive.'

But this is to misread the story. Mary did not sit still when she knew Jesus had come. On the contrary, she 'arose quickly' and went to meet Him. There was no sullenness in her stillness. It was only the quiet of a meditation that was bringing her to the peace of resignation. She had not quite reached it yet. But we see how far she had got by what passed between her and Jesus. 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.' It is the same words as Martha uses, but in how different a tone. There is no pleading remonstrance, no attempt to reverse the dark sentence of death. She only sobs out her sorrow at Jesus' feet and leaves it there. Not, we may be sure, that she had not as much faith as her sister, but she has more reverence. She will not presume to ask what her Lord had already refused. She only casts herself at His feet and leaves Him to do the rest.

That silent sorrow moved Him more than all Martha's arguments. He wept, and bade

them lead on to the tomb. Perhaps, next to 'the glory of God,' it was the tears of Mary that unsealed the grave of Lazarus.

Now I am not going to pursue the story further. Let me just point out the value of quiet meditation in unsealing the mysteries of life. When a great experience comes to you like this, a great joy or sorrow, a great problem or task, meet it, if you wish to do so successfully, in the armour of previous prolonged meditation. You remember Newton's simple explanation of his success in solving the most tremendous mathematical problems, 'By thinking into it.' 'Into it'—that is what meditation means—getting into the midst of a thing, into its heart and centre.

We hear it said, 'Meditation is a lost art to-day.' I am not so sure. We all meditate at times. The question is, 'What upon?' Most of us meditate solely on ourselves, and the result is only to minister to our vanity or bitterness or enervation. We feast on our unholy desires, or brood over our mortifications, or obsess our minds with our future difficulties, until the doctor has to come and tell us to think less and get out into the fresh

air. A good advice; but what we need, is not so much thinking less, as thinking on the right things. 'Whatsoever things are lovely, . . . if there be any praise, think on these things, and the God of peace *shall* be with you.'

Think, for example, on the lovely things of *Nature*. Earth is Heaven's footstool. Sit on that fair seat and listen to Her words of peace. Do not give all your holidays to golf. Reserve the Sabbath, and specially its evening, for that 'House of Quiet.' Rest beneath the great mountains until their 'purple silence' fills your soul. Listen to the unconscious music of the sea till

> 'Beauty born of murmuring sound
> Shall pass into your face.'

You will become, under Nature's gentle remedy, 'a woman of quiet.'

But 'if the footstool be so fair, what must be the throne?' Hear the voice of Him who still calls to weary men, 'Come unto Me and I will give you rest.' By faith, by prayer, by Holy Communion, make yourself one with Him. Get that mind into you which was in Him, then life's wrinkles will all smooth

out. The mystery of death will grow less dark. You will reach a higher faith than was possible to Mary, the faith which is able to say, even at a grave,

> 'Lord, Thou *hast* been here!
> My brother has *not* died.'

III. Once more we see in Mary the *quiet of consecration.*

The scene is Simon's house; though I strongly suspect it was *Martha's feast.* That was her practical way of showing her grateful love to Jesus for raising her brother from the grave. Mary's emotion took a quieter, more poetic form. When the guests were assembled at the table—probably just after the grace—she silently stole in and broke an alabaster of the most precious ointment over His head. She had long thought on this. How could she show her love to the Saviour? She had no eloquence of word like Miriam, no eloquence of deed like Martha. What could she do for Jesus? This; gather all her savings together and pour them forth in one grand act of consecration over the head of Him she loved.

At first she got little thanks. The extrava-

gance of it struck every one. It was senseless waste. It might have been sold for three hundred pence—at least ten pounds in our money, and considering the relative value of money now and then, a tremendous sum for a peasant girl. One wonders indeed where she got it. Probably it was the long savings of a lifetime. As Barrie says of a similar gift, 'I do not know the history of that five-pound note, but well aware am I that it grew slowly out of pence and silver, and that he denied his passions many things for this great hour. His sacrifices watered his young heart and kept it fresh and tender. Let us no longer cheat our consciences by talking of filthy lucre. Money may always be a beautiful thing. It is we who make it grimy.'

However wasteful the gift may have seemed to others, it was not so to Christ. He defended Mary again to the party, as before He had been her advocate to Martha. 'She hath wrought a beautiful deed,' He said. 'And for two reasons. "She hath done what she could." No man can do more, and besides, "she hath anointed My body for the burying."' Did Mary know that in a few days the dead body of Jesus was to lie

mangled and bleeding on a cross? I cannot think so. It was just Christ's poetic way of saying, 'There is a mystic meaning in this love-gift you do not understand. Meanwhile, I tell you there is no waste here. With these three hundred pence she has raised a monument that time will never decay; from that broken box there exhales an aroma that will sweeten my dying hour and perfume all her future days.'

What is the lesson of it all? Is it not this? That we, who are so very busy that we cannot pray, would often do more if we did less? Yes, the work may be good, as good as 'giving to the poor,' and yet there may be a higher duty which we owe to ourselves and which, left undone, makes it impossible for us to do the other well.

Maeterlinck tells of a lighthouse man who, instead of caring for his lighthouse, gave to the poor in the cabins about him the oil of the mighty lantern that served to illumine the sea. When the darkness fell on the stormy reef, and drowning cries of sailors were heard above the tempest, men did not bless him that he had spent on charity what

he owed to duty. 'Which things are an allegory.'

'The immaterial force that shines in our heart must shine first of all for itself, for in this condition alone shall it shine for the other as well. See that you give not away the oil of your lamp, be it never so small. Let your gift be the flame, its crown.'

XV

THE SOCIETY WOMAN

'Remember Lot's wife.'—Luke xvii. 32.

When a woman goes into sin, she goes much deeper than a man. All the time Lot was in Sodom, he 'was vexed with its filthy communications.' But all the time Lot's wife was there, these filthy communications were soaking into her soul, till, when the angel of mercy came to save her from the angel of judgment, she would not, nay, could not be saved.

She looked back! What was there in that long, loving gaze? Ah, the world was there and all the world's power! She thought of Sodom's gay nights, its dances and entertainments, its laughter and wild libidinous gaiety! and then she contrasted that with the dull country life she was going to. Living in tents—for her who had lived in drawing-rooms! The society of sheep—for the society of Sodom! It could not be. Her husband was a doated fool. She would go back, and

they would all join her to-morrow looking very foolish! So back she went, and as she did the fires fell, and she with them, in a swoon that had no awaking. The lava encrusted her and built round her a sarcophagus. The salt air whitened it into marble. Nature made for her at once grave and monument. 'She became a pillar of salt.'

'A pillar of salt,' and in that word we have a symbol of *character* as well as a monument of *destiny*. A pillar of salt is the picture of many a society woman to-day. All the sweet blood of a true woman's heart has become brackish by the life she leads. Instead of a woman, you have only 'a pillar of salt.'

Yet salt is good in its place. I am to speak to you about the society woman. I must guard you from thinking I am referring to the woman of society. She has her place, and a very valuable one, in life. She may be an elevating force there. Without deciding the comparative value of society and solitude, the fact remains that man is, as the sage said, 'a social animal.' He must live with his fellows. To go out of society is to go out of the world. Now the function of a good

woman in society is to be its salt. Take woman out of society, and it immediately degenerates. Why is the morality of a camp so difficult to maintain? Because there are no women. Why is the conversation of the smoking-room often so painfully lower than that of the parlour or the drawing-room? Once again, because there are no women usually there. Thank God for the woman of society! We need her there as the evangelist of purity and gentleness, of all that makes for refinement and unselfishness. Christ did not forsake society, and neither should any woman, under the idea that solitude is more conducive to the religious life. This is to defeat the prayer of the Master, 'I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil.'

Nevertheless, let us remember that the old proverb is specially true with regard to her —*Corruptio optimi pessima.* As there is no minister of Christ so efficient in society as a good woman, so there is none so corrupting as one that is false and impure. As Dr. George Adam Smith has said, 'When woman is corrupt, the State is moribund.' And there

is in society much that has power to corrupt her. Its fascination and glitter get hold of her as they seldom do of men who have other interests in their business life. It becomes to her the be-all and end-all of existence. To see and be seen, to be admired and envied —this is to multitudes of women the chief end of life. Of course it is chiefly in the capital cities of a nation, where society spells itself with a capital S, that this type is seen in its perfection. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to it everywhere. You can see it here in our own city, and you can see it in the quietest and most provincial of towns— men and women who live for pleasure and show, and unfortunately have an influence on others who are not of 'their set'; but think that somehow they are 'the thing,' and should therefore be copied. We are all more or less influenced by our neighbours. 'None of us liveth to himself,' and no man, and still less no woman, dieth to oneself. Many of us know little more of the society woman than what we meet with in the pages of the society novelist; but we are influenced by her all the same; and therefore Christ's message has for us an eternal significance—

'Remember Lot's wife. Behold the fate of the society woman.'

What, then, are the dangers of the society life? What are the evils Christ would point out in the man, and especially the woman, who lives for society? When we turn the pages of the old Book to Lot's story, we notice specially three, and as we do so we are impressed again with the modernity of its picture.

I. First, the Bible condemns the society woman for *her waste of life's precious opportunity*.

This is the thought that emerges from the Saviour's reference to Lot's wife. He is speaking of the solemn opportunities of life, and how easily they may be missed. 'As it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, until the fire came and destroyed them all. Then he that is on the house-top, let him not come down to take anything out of the house; and he that is in the field, let him not return back. Remember Lot's wife.'

What duty could seem more insistent than that a man should go down the stairs of his house before making his exit from it? Yes,

but if there be a fire in the basement of his house, it may be necessary to precipitate himself from its window.

So still the opportunity of life may be so all-absorbing that nothing should stand in its way. Yet this is the opportunity that the woman of society too often squanders away. The claims of pleasure are so all-engrossing that everything is sacrificed to them. I remember a girl once telling me that during the last fortnight she had not been a single night at home except once on a Sunday. It had been a succession of parties night after night up till three and four in the morning. And what shall we say of those who have not one but two or even three entertainments every night? who spend their whole existence in one round of pleasure? What an awful prostitution of life's golden opportunity, of God's precious gift of time! Can we wonder that when time is treated in that fashion, it should turn round on its destroyer and become his bitterest enemy—

'Deep weariness and sated lust'

making 'human life a hell'?

One of the saddest and yet truest pictures

of the life of the modern society woman is that given by Miss Edith Wharton in her *House of Mirth*. With powerful hand she paints the unsatisfactoriness and yet the fascinations of the life of the woman of pleasure. '"You think," she describes her heroine as saying, "we live *on* the rich rather than *with* them; and so we do in a sense, but it is a privilege we have to pay for. We eat their dinners and drink their wines, and smoke their cigarettes, and use their carriages and their opera-boxes and their private cars. Yes, but there 's a tax to pay on every one of these luxuries. The man pays it by big tips to the servants, by playing cards beyond his means, by flowers and presents and lots of things that cost; the girl pays it by tips and cards too, and by going to the best dress-makers and having the right dress just for every occasion, and always keeping herself fresh and exquisite and amusing."

'She leaned back, closing her eyes as she said the words; the eyelids dropped above her fagged, brilliant gaze. She looked up again. "It doesn't sound very amusing, and it isn't. I 'm sick to death of it. And yet the thought of giving it up kills me." '

It is a picture of the woman of pleasure drawn by the hand of one who knows the subject from the inside, and its tragic end is always spiritually, if not literally fulfilled. 'She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.'

One of the most common ways of killing time to-day is by card-playing, and especially by the playing of bridge. I have no objection to cards if done within measure and kept clear of money points. In a large company of low conversational and musical powers it may be a natural and agreeable form of human intercourse. But I do think the thing is quite overdone even in its innocent form. I heard of a small provincial town the other day where a number of ladies met every week on one of the afternoons simply to play bridge. These ladies were not fast ladies. Some of them were engaged in Church work. And yet, there you have this subtle form of amusement creeping in on the working hours and encroaching on the busiest time of the day. You say, 'Where 's the harm?' but I ask, 'Where 's the good in an afternoon spent like that?' Is it a worthy way of spending God's precious gift of time?

When there are so many things you can do with your life; when so many are perishing all around you for lack of a woman's loving hand to help; when your homes and your children are being neglected; when your husbands are being driven into debt and wild speculation by the extravagant outlays necessitated by your frivolities—surely you might find some more profitable way of using the precious hours of day!

II. I pass now to speak of the second count in the Bible's indictment of the society woman, *her heartless indifference to the claims of love and sorrow.*

This too is seen in Lot's wife, for what could have been more heartless than to leave her husband and children in the night and go back to Sodom? There are, however, other and more glaring pictures of heartless women in the sacred picture-gallery than Lot's wife. Chief among these Lucrezia Borgias of the Bible must be mentioned the two women of Herod's court, Salome and her mother. Which were the more heartless, it were hard to say. Both stand out before us as pillars of salt. How true are the words

of Burns in regard to the life of pleasure, 'it petrifies the feeling.' How petrified that heart, that woman's heart must be, that could plan out such a tragedy! Yes, and yet I believe there are in society to-day women as cruel and ruthless as Herodias. To think that women could be got in hundreds and thousands to gather in a music-hall to see a woman reproduce Salome's dance in the most revolting 'dress' is a proof of that. The life of pleasure does still turn tender-hearted women into veritable 'pillars of salt.'

I am told that there are women in society to-day who take far more interest in their dogs than they do in their own flesh and blood. I heard not long ago of an American woman of fashion who came over to Europe in order to accompany her husband, who was in an ailing condition. With very great difficulty she was persuaded to leave her two pet dogs behind her in order to give her undivided attention to him. On arriving at Paris, however, a telegram was awaiting her conveying the awful tidings that one of the precious puppies was dead. She did not hesitate for a moment, but

immediately left her husband to the tender mercies of a French nurse and fled back to New York, to be reunited to her precious dog! What a meeting that must have been! Yes, and what a meeting afterwards in Paris when she rejoined her dying husband, this time in the company of her henceforth never-to-be-separated poodle!

Thank God that sickly sentiment is unknown here; but it is unfortunately not unknown to see women rolling in luxury and spending on a single dress or entertainment what would keep a household in bread for twelve months. It is this, as Mr. Lecky says, that is the real cause of the rapid growth of socialism in every civilised land to-day. 'Wealth which is expended in multiplying real comforts will never excite serious indignation. It is the colossal waste of the means of human happiness, in the most selfish and vulgar forms of social advertisement and competition, that gives force and almost justification to anarchical passions which menace the whole future of our civilisation.'

Let me then affectionately urge upon you who are tempted by the glitter of society

to interest yourselves in some great and unselfish cause. Go down to your poorer brothers and sisters, and give them a helping hand in the bitter struggle of their lives. It will be a means of blessing both to yourselves and to others. It will enrich your life with a gladness that will require no pet dogs on which to expend your unused emotions, and it will do more to arrest social anarchy than a hundred sermons or ten thousand policemen.

III. I have only a few minutes left for my last thought. *A life given to society becomes very deaf, and at last dead altogether to the Voice of God.*

'She that liveth in pleasure,' says the apostle, 'is dead while she liveth.' Dead while she liveth! Yes, that was what Lot's wife was. All the time she seemed very much alive. With her dances and dinners, with her theatres and card-parties, she seemed to be far more alive than Abraham's quiet wife in the uplands of Judah. But the appearance was only an apparition. I once saw the corpse of an American child lying in his little coffin. He was dressed, after the

American fashion, in his beautiful velvet suit. There was a delicate flush on his sweet face. His golden curls wandered down his fine brow as they used to do when he was alive. It was one of the fairest sights I had ever seen. And yet one of the saddest! For, after all, he was dead! Already corruption was at work beneath, and soon, too soon, the fair face would be an unsightly thing which love could only hide away in the mould with breaking heart.

So was it with the immortal part of Lot's wife. She had a name to live, but all the time she spent in Sodom her soul was being slowly poisoned until at last it died altogether. It was not the fiery flames that killed her in deepest truth. It was Sodom and its life. She died by her own hand, as many a woman is dying to-day. The voice of God sounded in her ear, but it awakened no response in her benumbed and asphyxiated soul. 'She heard it, but she heeded not.' Her heart was far away in Sodom—its society and its sin.

How shall we prevent the fascinations of society laying their hold upon us in such a way as to make us dead to all higher interests?

The answer to that is given in the life of Jesus Christ. He was a man of society. He did not shun the crowd. The first of all His miracles took place at a social function. He sat at meat in the Pharisee's house. He went as a guest to the feast of Matthew the publican. He came 'eating and drinking.'

And yet, as you well know, He was a man of the solitudes too. There is a striking contrast in His life suggested by St. John when he says, 'Every man went to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.' It is the contrast of society and solitude. 'Every man' was different from Jesus; Jesus was different from 'every man.' The one had his home, and he went to it; the Other was homeless, and the mountain was His rest. The one had friends and sought them; the Other was friendless and went to the solitudes. The one was of the world, and returned to his worldly pursuits; the Other was not of the world, and sought His God.

If we would keep our spiritual life fresh and healthy, there must be in it an element of solitude. Just as the plant needs the night to rest and the tree its winter to mature, so

man needs his quiet hours if he would retain the freshness of his spirit, the vitality of his faith.

Make a solitude in your life from time to time, and see that it is a solitude. We in Protestantism have given up our conventual retreats. I am not sure it is for many a wise remission. But the best solitude is that which you can make for yourself. The quiet hour with God in the morning before you go down to the turmoil of the day; the lonely walk by the seashore when

> 'There is society, where none intrudes,
> By the deep sea, and music in its roar';

the solitudes which a gracious God makes for us by a time of sickness and withdrawal from the active interests of life—let us use these as they come, and then our souls will be defended from the aridity of what we call human intercourse. We shall be like the tree planted by the river of waters, whose leaf fadeth not.

We can never be reminded too often of Goethe's wise words, 'Character is perfected in the stream of life, but Genius lives in the stillness.' We need the stream of life, but

our best thoughts, our most vivifying emotions, come to us in the quiet hours.

'Where is thy haunt, eternal voice,
The region of thy choice,
Where, undisturbed by sin and earth, the soul
Owns thine entire control?
'Tis on the mountain's summit dark and high,
Where storms are hurrying by;
'Tis on the strong foundations of the earth,
Where tumults have their birth.'

'Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.'

XVI

THE WOMAN OF DECISION

'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'—RUTH i. 16.

To the vast majority the usual course of life is quiet and uneventful. Trivial round and common task make up our days. We go down to our work with but little expectation; we return with that little realised. Those shining deeds of heroism, those sublime thoughts and romantic passages, which are the stock-in-trade of the poet and the novelist, do not occur in 'real life.' Quietly, in commonplace toil and colourless pleasure, the stream of our existence glides sluggishly away.

But into this gentle flow of unrippled routine there may suddenly come a change. The current of life runs quicker; the stream gets angrier. The river flows on to a cataract. What before was an 'idle lake' is now a

Niagara. The stillness of our placid life is exchanged for hours that are charged with meaning and moments that are quick with emotion. Epochs impressive with opportunity, rich in possibility, or bodeful with catastrophe, rush upon the soul. We achieve in a few hours or lose in a few moments what a lifetime could not offer and cannot undo.

Such a moment was this for Ruth. Hitherto her life had been like that of most Eastern maidens. It had been made for her; she had done little to make it herself. Now all is changed. As these three lonely widows stand on that country road, she feels she has come to one of the great decisive points of life. She is 'Diana at the Crossways.' Behind her, in the sweet light of reminiscence, is Moab, the home of her childhood, her mother and father; the scene of her friendships, the centre of her interests. Before her lies Israel with its dark, forbidding hills, its alien faces, its unknown trials. What calls her thither? To outward seeming, little. Ease, pleasure, even common prudence, as Naomi points out, bid her return to that land where love and hope are waiting for one so winning.

Yes, but she 'hears a voice we cannot hear.' It is the voice of duty, of compassion, of faith, of love. This calls her on, and will not let her go. That desolate widow strikes her heart with a high heroic note. Nor that only. It is no mere Naomi she sees standing before her there in piteous farewell. It is her dead husband's mother. Nay, more, it is her dead husband's faith, her dead husband's Jehovah. Can she go forward to make these her own? She can, and even now she will. And the depth of her heroic resolve is measured by the high impassioned language in which that resolve finds expression.

Nowhere, it has been truly said, in the whole of the Old Testament, are there words more beautiful in their simple pathos or more eloquent in their unconscious poetry.

'Intreat me not to leave thee,
To return from following after thee:
Whither thou goest, I will go;
Where thou lodgest, I will lodge:
Thy people shall be my people,
Thy God shall be my God:
Where thou diest, will I die,
There also will I be buried:
Jehovah do so to me, and more also,
If ought but death part thee and me.'

Such moments come to us all. They may not do so with such vibrant calls as Ruth's did. But come they will. The quality of decision is one of the most important a character can possess, because there is no life, however uneventful, into which there do not come at some time urgent appeals for its exercise; moments when the soul must say 'I will,' or 'for ever hold its peace.' There are at least three great choices which meet most men in life—the choice of work, the choice of love, and the choice of God—and each of these is mirrored in some measure in the choice of Ruth.

There is, first of all, the *choice of our life-work.* How important the need for wise decision there! What shall we do with our boy? what shall we make of our girl? is the helpless cry of many a parent whose children cannot make up their minds for themselves. No doubt it is often hard. I am glad that, under the initiative of Mrs. Ogilvie Gordon, our school-boards are now taking up the matter, and that in some at least there is a special class for those who are deciding on their life-work.

Such information is calculated to be of the highest value; but quite as important is the responsibility lying on yourselves, the need for thought and prayer to make the choice your own, and not to drift into life like flotsam and jetsam on the sea of circumstance.

Look at Ruth in that respect. How gently and yet invincibly she states her decision. She comes before us as a woman who can make up her mind and stick to it when made. How she clings to her purpose in spite of the expostulations of Naomi, or the humiliations of Bethlehem! There is no looking back. Doubtless she had many a weary hour before she 'found rest' in her husband's house.

Keats has a poet's picture of her standing listening to the song of the nightingale in the evening fields of Bethlehem:

> 'Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth when sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn.'

It may have been so; but if so, she never went back on her word. When she made up her mind, she made it once and for all. She had burnt her boats behind her. Safety lay only in going forward.

Many a young man enters on his life-work in a shilly-shallying spirit that makes success impossible. Of course I do not say there are exceptions where a man or woman may not do right to change their minds. Decision is not obstinacy. Decision is persistence with reason. Obstinacy is persistence without reason. What I do say is, that in the vast majority of cases he who wins is he who makes up his mind firmly at the start and holds it unswerving to the end.

In this connection the wise words of John Foster recur to the mind. His whole essay on 'Decision' is indeed well worth the perusal of every young man. 'Some men,' he says, 'seem to be carried along by a succession of events, and are, as it were, handed forward in helpless passiveness from one to another. They have no determined principle in their characters by which they could constrain outward events to serve their inward purpose. The events seize them, not they the events. Others again, advancing through life with an inward invincible determination, have seemed to make their surroundings, whatever they were, conduce to their chief designs. Even the outward circumstances

of life bow to a spirit that will not bow to them.'

> 'O well for him whose will is strong;
> He suffers, but he will not suffer long:
> He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong.'

Another great call for decision in life emerges *in the choice of our friendships.*

Next to a man's work, often exceeding it, is the importance of his friendships. No doubt in forming these there is often no conscious act of choice. Elective affinities and contiguity drift us into our attachments without our being aware of the lifelong issues that are involved. But even so, there always comes some time when an element of decision intervenes. If there be but little choice involved in the making of our friends, there is much in deciding whether we should keep them. We gain a perception of their inner life such as we had not before. We come to realise the responsibility this new tie will involve. We awake to the influence it is exerting on us.

All this forces on us a decision of the highest import, and sometimes that decision has to be very quickly made. We may

make or mar our life in a few hours. For, as Henry Drummond said, 'There is nothing we exaggerate more than the power of our words. There is nothing we exaggerate less than the effect of our influence.' The impact of a personality, silent, pervasive, lifelong, who can estimate this?

Ruth's choice has a message for us here. It is the choice of a lifelong friend. Do not smile when I tell you that friend is a mother-in-law. That only shows the originality of the Bible. If you or I had been seeking a frame for these glowing and impassioned words, we would have looked for it somewhere else in the story of Ruth. But God is no romancist. God is a realist. Truth is stranger than fiction. The sweetest lover's vow in Scripture, and perhaps in all literature, was addressed to—a mother-in-law.

Well, perhaps the Bible wanted to teach some of us a lesson in that! But that is not my point. My point is, this is the choice of a friend, 'till death us do part.' 'Where thou diest, there also will I die.' Now, looking at it in that light, what do we learn from this choice? Do we not learn this,

that the basis of it should be religious? That of course is not all, or even the impelling motive of it. But it is the basis of it. 'Thy people shall be my people,' says Ruth; 'thy God my God.' She realises there can be no true harmony of souls where there is not moral and religious unity of convictions.

Do we realise that as we ought? Would there be so many tragic endings to our friendships if the foundations were oftener laid in the Rock of Ages? Would there be so many wasted lives were our young people more careful as to the moral character of those they admit to the inner shrine of their souls? Is not the basis of our friendships too much *disposition* and too little *character*?

It is told of an eminent scientist that, when he was recovering from his last illness, his wife by mistake gave him to drink a poisonous lotion meant only for external use. As the doomed man felt too late the effects of the fatal draught, he turned to his wife and said, in mild reproach, 'You have killed your John.'

So might many a man say to his friend, 'You have killed your friend. Yours was the fatal hand, when I was struggling back

to life, put to my lips the fatal cup that sent me down to death.' Therefore,

> 'The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
> Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;
> But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
> Of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade.'

It has been said, there is no test of a man better than the friends he makes. It is as true to say, there is no better test of a man than the friends he breaks. A man comes to you and says he has had his lesson and means to make a new start. But does he go back to the old set? That is the question. 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' If you wish your friendships to be like Ruth's, stepping-stones to heaven, let them be built like hers—on Naomi's God.

That brings us to the last and greatest decision of all we see mirrored in these beautiful words, *the decision about God.*

Ruth's choice was essentially a religious choice. It closes with a vow to Israel's God. It dethrones Chemosh for ever. It exalts Jehovah as her future guide and shield. As such, I do not think we need scruple to call it her 'conversion.'

For what do we mean by conversion? The

word has been so much used that, like a George the Fourth shilling, it has become very light in weight, and very illegible in its 'image and superscription.' It has become stereotyped into a uniform experience with regulation emotions and convictions and doctrines; and if a man has not had these, he is not converted. But what does this noble word, too often soiled with ignoble use, really mean? Conversion is simply a turning—the turning of the soul from self and all that the self-life implies, to duty, sacrifice, and God.

In a deep sense that turning must take place in every life that 'gets home.' For our faces are not naturally 'turned thitherward.' Explain it as we will, 'evil is present with us.' And it is when the soul hears that Divine Voice within, which is the voice of the eternal Christ, and hearing it says, 'Whither Thou goest, I will go; Thy people shall be my people, and Thy God my God,' and saying it, does it for life and death—it is then it is truly converted.

Have you heard it? I knew a young man who was much troubled with questionings as to what this thing 'conversion' was. He thought it was a mysterious experience which came he knew not how, but without

which he could not be saved, until one day the preacher pointed out from these words that this was just Ruth's conversion; that it meant for her just what it means for us—the turning of the will to Christ; the identifying of our souls with all that is best and highest in human life. Even then that young man made that choice, leaving the feelings and convictions to come after if they chose; and though, like Ruth, he had his own trials and difficulties after that, yet he never went back on it, and never will.

It was so with Ruth. She had her own trials and humiliations, doubtless, in the harvest-fields of Ephrath and the twilight hours of Bethlehem, when she looked out perhaps at the purple hills of Moab and thought of dear ones far away. But she never faltered, never went back, however deep 'the slough of despond'; and in the end the promise of the Master was richly fulfilled. She received a hundredfold even in this life, and in the world to come eternal life. By her marriage with Boaz she not only found 'woman's rest,' but gained immortality. She entered on the 'royal line' of Scripture,

becoming the grandmother of Jesse, who was the father of David, and so the progenitor of the Saviour of the world.

It was fitting, doubtless, that He 'to whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free,' should have among His ancestors Rahab the harlot and Ruth the alien. He came to unite all men, and therefore, as Dr. Matheson has truly said, 'the marriage bells of Ruth were the same which sounded at the marriage supper of the Lamb.'

Nevertheless her honour was none the less real. She seemed to be giving all for love; she was really gaining all. Her life touched immortality when her lips closed in love on Naomi's. Sweet, says one, are the associations of Bethlehem. 'There the beloved Rachel slept. There the dutiful Ruth lived and died. There the shepherd boy meditated his first poems, by the well that is at the gate. There, among angelic anthems, they laid the wonderful Child. Everlasting charm lingers about these hills, and of all the names that make them dear, none is dearer, before the Lord Himself was born there, than that of Ruth the Moabitess.'

XVII

THE DISCONTENTED BRIDE

'Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs.'—JOSHUA xv. 19.

BRIDES are said to be sometimes difficult to please in the matter of their dowry. They have, of course, no wish to do anything to impoverish their dear father or mother; but then there are so many things in the home they are leaving which will never be missed that, after they have gone, the home is apt to miss a good deal.

It was so at least with Achsah, the daughter of that glorious soldier, the veteran Caleb. He had given his daughter a noble dower; but she does not seem to have been altogether contented with it; for, when she came to her husband, we find her egging him on to make a further request from the old man. The bridegroom, however, seems to

have refused having anything to do with the matter. Probably he felt that, after being so generously dealt with, it would be ungracious to ask for more. Possibly, too, he surmised that what in a daughter would be looked on as the pardonable boldness of a child, would in him be justly resented. At all events he kept in the background, and let his prudent bride engineer the transaction. She was quite equal to the occasion. She tactfully pointed out to her father that the portion he had given her was in the Soudan of Palestine. It was far from the fertilising streams of the Lebanon. It had none of the 'precious things' of the 'lasting hills' about it like Ephraim or Naphtali. It was a south land subjected to perpetual drought. Then she directed his attention to a lovely oasis which lay quite near, but still outwith her promised dower. 'Thou hast given me a south land. Give me also springs of water.' And Caleb honoured her request, giving her more than she expected—not only one oasis but two. He gave her the upper and the nether springs.

Now this simple Old Testament story is

rich in suggestiveness. It brings before us truths which are helpful to us all in regard to the inheritances with which our heavenly Father has dowered us. In considering it let us look at

I. *The discontented bride*—a picture of the *insufficiency of life's joy.*

Surely, if there was ever a time when Achsah's cup was full to overflowing, it was then. She has just wedded a brave and noble husband. She has received from her father a fair inheritance. Everything points to contentment and happiness. She might well have sung at such a time, 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places. I have a goodly heritage.'

Yet we find it very much otherwise. She sees only the limitations in her lot. Instead of saying, 'My cup runneth over,' she cries, 'Give me also.'

'Give me *also*.' It is a striking and significant word. Yes, if I wanted to write an essay on the limitations of human happiness, I could not find a better text than this. There is an 'also' in every cup of human bliss. There is always a something more

needed to complete the circle of perfect peace in every earthly lot; the

> '. . . little more, and how much it is;
> The little less, and what worlds away!'

Here is a man who has got on pretty well in business. He has a tidy little income, and can live quite well upon it in his small suburban villa. Is he satisfied? Far from it. 'I have got £400 a year,' he says to himself; 'let me get £200 more, and when I 've £600 a year I 'll be all right.' And so he plans and toils, and adds a good deal to his anxious nights, and perhaps subtracts not a few from his happy days, all because of that word 'also.' 'Give me also.'

Or here is a man who has got on very well. He has an income of four figures. He has succeeded far beyond the expectations of his boyhood, and is looked on by his fellows as a very wealthy and lucky man. Yet in his heart he too is very far from satisfied. 'I have £1200 or £1500 a year,' he says; 'but now, if I had just the £2000, or even a little over it, I might buy a little place in the country, and even by and by become a county magnate.'

Or here, to come closer to our subject, is a girl who, like Achsah, has wedded a very good and worthy man. As the pair stand at the altar, or go away from her home amid a shower of good wishes—and other things—you would say there was not a happier girl in your acquaintance. She has got the man of her choice, and he is worthy of it. And yet is she happy? At first she is; but very soon that little word 'also' creeps into her joy too. For her husband is a country clergyman and he brings her to some home far away, among the woods or the hills—a home which looks perfectly idyllic, but is in fact very dull. And she begins to sigh for the smart people she used to know in her old city home, and longs for the society of the manor or the castle. 'For the people of her husband's congregation are very decent, but quite impossible to make friends with.' And so, from being a happy bride, she becomes a discontented bride, and perhaps becomes a hindrance to her husband instead of a help. 'Give me also,' she says like Achsah, but perhaps without Achsah's justification and with little of Achsah's grace.

So in every life there is some point of

dissatisfaction, some fly in the ointment, some jarring note in the harmony.

> 'There is no life that hath not held some sorrow;
> There is no joy but hath its hour of pain.'

The heart, like the horse-leech, has two daughters which can never have enough, and their names are 'Give, Give!'

II. But our text teaches us not merely the dissatisfaction of the earthly life, but it also points us further to the meaning and purpose of that dissatisfaction and the true way to deal with it. This brings us to the second picture of our text—*the bride's petition*, or the way to deal with budding discontent.

What did Achsah do with her dissatisfaction? Did she go away in sullen silence, too proud to ask, but saying to herself that she had been very meanly and scurvily treated, and that she and Othniel ought to have received something more? If she had done so, I dare say her poor old father would have gone home that day not a little perplexed and not a little vexed. For I have little or no doubt that the omission of 'a spring of

water' was an entire oversight on his part, and that, as the issue showed, he would have been delighted to grant her all, and more than all she wished. But if she had made no sign to him except a sour face, he would have gone home none the wiser, saying to himself or his wife afterwards, 'I wonder what ailed Achsah to-day. She did not take leave of me as I thought she would. She hardly thanked me, and looked at me as black as thunder.' And he would have mused, like poor Lear, on the wintry wind of 'man's ingratitude to man.'

It was not so with Achsah. I have called her 'the discontented bride,' but the title is a misnomer. At least, if she was discontented, she was so in the nobler sense of that word. For there is, as we all know, a divine discontent; just as there is a contentment which is very undivine. There is a discontent which is the mother of all aspiration and advancement, a discontent which

> 'the weak spirit doth raise
> To scorn delights and live laborious days.'

It does not sit still in sour gloom, casting reproaches on God and man. It bestirs itself

to see whether the situation can be bettered, and if it cannot, cheerfully resigns itself to make the best of the worst by trying to see the good in the bad.

This was the spirit of our heroine. As she first looked around on her dreary 'south land,' her heart may have sunk within her. Strangeness of scenery is charm to the tourist but sadness to the settler. How will she ever be happy in this treeless wilderness? But if this was her first thought, she does not allow it to be her second. She does not burst into tears, crying out, 'What a miserable place! O father, you have given Othniel and me a wretched home to live in! Was this worth risking his life for?' No; with a woman's initiative she sets herself at once to repair the damage in her husband's prospects that her dowry may have seemed to make. First, she suggests a line of action to her husband, and when he declines to interfere, she takes the business into her own hands. 'She lighted off her ass.' The movement was an act of reverence. It indicated courtesy, respect, the duty which a daughter offers to a father. Here was no petulant ill-temper, but the gentle grace of

a maiden, true at once to her father and her husband.

'She lighted off her ass.' The Hebrew word is very unusual. It indicates violence, force, determination. 'She forced herself off the ass.' It was distasteful to her to do this in the last degree; but love to her husband urged her on, doing violence to her feelings in order that she might further her husband's interests.

And then, having bowed before her father, she proffers her request with a sweet reasonableness that must have swept every barrier of reluctance away. 'Give me a blessing'; that is to say, 'Let your gift be a real blessing. Thou hast given me a south land. Give me also springs of water.' Little wonder that, with such a wife, Othniel should rapidly have risen to fame, and that in after days we should find him as the chief ruler of the land, filling the shoes of Joshua and Moses.

Now the lesson of all this is so obvious that one need hardly drag it home. It is the lesson of prayer. We have a better Father than ever Achsah had, and if at times He seems to lead us into a south land of trial and

barrenness, our course is clear. Let us do with our inheritance what she did. Let us 'bring it to the Lord in prayer.' 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask Him.' Ask your heavenly Father and He will put it all right for you.

I do not say, mind you, that it is an easy thing to do that—effectively. The man who thinks prayer an easy thing has never known what it is to pray greatly and effectually. It was not easy to Achsah to pray to an earthly father. She had to force herself to the ground. And it is not easy to pray to God. The natural man is against it. It is said that Satan trembles when he sees a saint upon his knees. He may tremble, but he is very active as well. To pray greatly and effectually, you must pray long and hard, and that is never an easy thing. David Brainerd once said of his prayers—'After them I could scarcely walk straight. The sweat ran down my face and body, and Nature seemed as if it would dissolve.' 'The kingdom of heaven' is taken by 'violence' of that kind. The 'south land' discovers its

springs of water to one who cries, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.' Perhaps I am addressing one who has come into such a land in these past days. The scenery of your life has sadly altered in the last few weeks. You sigh and say, 'Oh that I were as in days past!' My brother, my sister, follow Achsah, but to a higher mercy-seat than hers, and you too shall find, in a grander sense, that your 'wilderness will be made glad, and the desert shall blossom as the rose.'

III. This brings us in the last place *to the father's gracious answer*, '*He gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs.*'

Caleb, you see, was kinder to his daughter than she had ever dared to hope. He not only gave her one well but two, 'the upper and the nether springs.' I suppose these nether springs would be in the plain, more easy to see and to reach. The upper ones would be in the hill country, far out of the beaten track. It would need a good deal of labour to get the water from there down to the thirsty plain; but once the aqueduct was formed, it would be a sure supply. The nether springs might fail in the drought of

summer, but the upper springs drew their supplies from the everlasting hills, and their crystal fountains would be ever flowing.

It is so in life. Every south land of trial and limitation has its own compensating springs of consolation did we only seek them out. And these 'springs' may, like Achsah's, be classed as 'the upper' and 'the nether.' The nether sources of compensation are those earthly sources of consolation which are opened up by natural courage and patience and energy.

The preacher who is weak in body may make up for his pastoral incapacity by an increased power in the pulpit. The woman who is ungifted in mind may develop a practical talent with hand and heart, that more than makes up for her intellectual deficiency. The life that is handicapped by the loss of some precious talent may concentrate itself with new zeal on what is left, and so mount to higher success on the very wave of calamity that seemed to engulf it.

One autumn day, more than sixty years ago, a young man in the prime of youth was out shooting with his father in the Salisbury fields. Fresh from Cambridge, one of its

'Wranglers' there, he seemed to have every opportunity for success that talent, family, and wealth could offer. Suddenly a stray shot from his father's gun struck his face, 'with the sad and singular result that the centre of each eye was pierced by the shot.' In a moment he was totally blind, his last vision of the outer world being the spire of Salisbury Cathedral. In such a calamity most men would have been plunged into irremediable despair. Not he. After a short time his spirits recovered their usual elasticity, and he seemed to feel the blow less than his heart-broken father. In a few weeks he returned to Cambridge, where he devoted himself to his favourite study—Political Economy—with such ardour that in a year he read, or rather recited, a paper to the British Association full of elaborate statistics. In five years he was a Cambridge Professor; in twenty a Cabinet Minister. I need not tell you his name—Henry Fawcett, the best Postmaster-General perhaps that our land has ever possessed.

Here was a man seeking and finding out nobly the nether springs of consolation which a south land of no ordinary desolation never-

theless possessed. It is an example big with inspiration to every young man or woman here. Your life handicap may be severe; it cannot be worse than Henry Fawcett's was when at twenty-five he 'saw' the spire of Salisbury fade away into the darkness of perpetual night. Yet how bravely he addressed life's task again! And it may be the very concentration such a loss made possible to him, and the sympathy it inspired in all who witnessed his noble fortitude, opened more paths than calamity closed. The south land, with its 'nether springs,' was richer for him than the streams of Lebanon or the waters of Damascus.

But while this is true of many, there are some to whom such an unravelling of 'the mystery of pain' is not possible—lives so handicapped by ill-health and repeated calamity that all these 'nether springs' are utterly dry. Such lives seem to have no compensation for their sorrows. They are valleys of Achor with only one door of hope—the grave.

Yet for these there remain 'the upper springs.' What are they? I answer, 'God.' You remember how Paul tapped that reser-

voir. There was a time in his life when all was a dreary 'south land.' 'Without were fightings, within were fears; *nevertheless,*' he adds, '*God.*' What a nevertheless! Your life may outwardly be a Sahara; but if 'your life is hid with Christ in God,' then you have within 'a well of water springing up to everlasting life.' For like the sea-holly which grows with succulent beauty on the arid shore, where nearly every other flower would perish, because its roots, long and deep, are in touch with the waters of the limitless ocean—so, no matter how hard, how weary, how desolate is the life of some, yet in the midst of it all they can sing like Madame Guyon in the Bastille:

'My heart is easy and my burden light.
I smile, though sad, when God is in my sight.
The more my woes in secret I deplore,
I taste Thy goodness and I love Thee more.
Here, while a solemn stillness reigns around,
Faith, hope and love within my soul abound;
And while my friends suppose me plunged in care,
The joys of angels, unperceived, I share.'

Are you in touch, my friends, with these 'upper springs' of God's secret love? The time is coming when every other spring will grow dry. There is a day in every life when

every other stream must fail. 'He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again.' But there is a river that never fails. It is the 'river of the water of life flowing out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.' Get in touch with that. Get in touch with it now. And then, when the other waters fail, you will be able to say with Halyburton as he lay on his dying bed, 'Here I lie pained, without pain; without strength, yet strong.' For such a man there can be no failing of life's sources. His 'foundation is in the holy mountains,' and at the end he can say, 'As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be *there*. All my springs are in Thee.'

XVIII

THE IDEAL MINISTER'S WIFE

'Greet Priscilla.'—Rom. xvi. 3.

WERE I preaching on wives in general, or ministers' wives in particular, I should feel a certain timidity to-night, for, after a sermon on the ideal minister's wife, I might expect a lecture on the ideal minister's wife's husband. And in that I fear most preachers would come off second best. If, as Stevenson says, when a man marries he domesticates his recording angel, what opportunities must such an angel have when she is the wife of a prophet! What a sad contrast between the ideal and the real! But fortunately the recording angel is usually more generous than just, and when the pen is lifted to record the inconsistency, a tear of love drops down and washes the record away.

For my part, however, I may say that I am no severe critic on ministers' wives, and I am sure you are not either. I am sure you

agree with me that they have a difficult part to play, combining in one the private duties of a wife and the public interests of a minister; making it their chief end in life to keep a bright and happy home, and yet trying, so far as time and strength will permit, to have interests that transcend the narrow domesticities of life.

Such double harness is not easy to hold, and calls for not a little sympathy with the holder. And it usually gets it. No doubt there are exceptional congregations that are rather exacting. I remember once a lady saying to me that the chief work her minister's wife did was to be the scapegoat of her husband; for, whenever he did wrong, the fault was at once laid on the wife! On the whole, however, congregations are wonderfully considerate; they do not expect the impossible. They realise, as one has said, that 'she is the minister's wife and not the church's wife; the companion of his life; the mother of his children, and not a co-pastor. To ask of her what may be expected of a Bible woman is most unreasonable.'[1]

My aim, however, to-night, is much more

[1] Rev. J. G. Greenough.

modest than that of discussing ministers' wives in general. It is rather to speak about one of the ministers' wives of the Bible. The Bible does not say much about ministers' wives as a whole. It does give two peeps of wives of the prophets in the Old Testament, Ezekiel's and Hosea's. The first of these seems to have been a good wife, if we may judge from the way the prophet mourned her when she died; the second—well, the less said of her the better.

In the New Testament we read that St. Peter 'led about a sister a wife,' but we know nothing of this partner of the great apostle, save that we may believe she was a good one, since he was so glad of her company. There is one wife, however, of whom we have more than a passing glimpse. This is Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, one of the most indefatigable missionaries of the early Church. She is mentioned six times, and though the references are often provokingly short, they are sufficient to give us the picture of 'an ideal minister's wife.'

For, shining out of these references we see one quality conspicuous—her noble loyalty;

her loyalty, first to her *husband*, second to the *Church*, third to the *truth*, and last, and best of all, to *Jesus Christ*.

I. Priscilla was loyal to her *husband*. His name, I have said, was Aquila, the eagle. It is a favourite of the Jews to this day. The last Chief Rabbi in London was an *Adler*. Aquila led a wandering life. We read of him first at Pontus, then at Rome, then at Corinth, then at Ephesus, then at Rome, then back to Ephesus again. But in all these wanderings his faithful Priscilla is ever at his side. The two names are always found together. Sometimes it is Aquila and Priscilla, more often it is Priscilla and Aquila; showing (both from the fact that she is mentioned at all, and still more that she is usually first) that in this case 'the grey mare' was clearly 'the better horse,' and that what little immortality Aquila has attained was largely due to his wife.

There is another interesting point here. Aquila was a Jew of Pontus—a remote land on the shores of the Black Sea, on the confines of civilisation. But Priscilla is a diminutive or pet form of Prisca, which is a

Roman name. It means ancient. Now 'old' is not a name you would give to a woman. They don't care to be called ancient. But it was a favourite in Rome because it meant there of *ancient blood*. It was aristocratic, like Lady Clara Vere de Vere, and so the fact that Priscilla came with Aquila from Rome leads scholars to think she must have been a Roman lady of good family who had fallen in love with this rich Jew of Pontus.[1] Such cases were not unknown at the Christian era, and if true, it enhances her loyalty to her husband. For when Aquila was expelled from Rome, in one of the first Jewish persecutions in history (alas! not the last), she never thought of deserting him, but cheerfully followed him wherever he went.

Of course this is a mere introductory point in Priscilla's character; but I want you to notice it, because it is the basis of all true wifehood, and is especially the excellence of a true minister's or missionary's wife. They have to follow their husbands often to very unattractive places, and the best feature of their character is that they can be happy and useful anywhere.

[1] So Dr. Hort.

A minister's wife was once asked, 'What place would you like best to live in?' 'Where my husband is happiest,' she replied. That was a true wife, and how often have ministers', and most of all missionaries' wives been like that! Henry Drummond describes in one of his books the feelings he had as he stood by the lonely grave of Livingstone's wife in Central Africa. As he stood by that deserted turf, it spoke to him of the great love of a woman's heart.

But the same thing is true of far more than ministers' wives. A man has usually two mistresses—his work and his wife. The former is often very exacting, and she is the wise wife who is not unduly jealous. It is said of the wife of Pasteur, the great scientist, that from the first she resolved that 'the laboratory must come before everything.' That vow she nobly kept, and on the thirty-fifth anniversary of her wedding-day she wrote to one of her children, 'Your father is absorbed in his thoughts, talks little, sleeps little, rises at dawn, and in one word continues the life I began with him this day thirty-five years ago.' Is there not a touch of pain in that sentence? And yet it was by means of that wife's sacrifice that one of

the noblest careers in science and philanthropy was made possible.

II. I pass now to Priscilla's second beautiful loyalty, *her loyalty to the Church.*

Priscilla and Aquila came to Corinth in search of a living, seeking an earthly fortune, perhaps, in that city of luxury and sin. But they found something far better, the pearl of great price, the unsearchable riches of Christ. This was almost certainly due to the coming of Paul into their life. He had arrived from Athens, depressed by his comparative failure there, and determined to know nothing in Corinth 'save Jesus and Him crucified.' But he had first to get a livelihood, and Providence led him to the warehouse of Aquila. Both were tentmakers, and thus commerce began what Christianity ended, the forming of a close friendship. For there was only one subject Paul could never keep long out of his conversation, and that was the subject some of us find so hard to get into it—Jesus Christ. Aquila was interested. Priscilla was consulted. She was persuaded. They were both baptized, and soon were among Paul's 'fellow-helpers

in Christ.' Some time after Paul determined to go to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla resolved to break up their business and go with him. In that city they did a great work for God. Having probably a larger house than most of the early Christians, they began that 'church in the house' which they seem to have continued wherever they went, for we hear of them doing the same thing at Rome also.

More than that, Paul speaks of them in our text as bringing the whole Church of Christ throughout the world into their debt, by 'laying down their necks' to save his life. What exactly he is referring to we do not know. Very likely it was the riot at Ephesus. Paul was in danger there of being torn to pieces by the mob. Aquila and Priscilla may have rushed into the raging crowd and dragged their beloved minister out at the imminent risk of their lives.

Such was the beautiful loyalty of Priscilla to her church and her minister. I say Priscilla because, though we must not forget Aquila, the phrase, 'the church in their house,' points to her as the chief partner in this concern. It would have been impossible

for Aquila to have had a church in his house if Priscilla had not been willing, indeed eager to have it. And it points an ideal to all women. You may not have the gifts Priscilla had, but you can all have a church in your house in one sense. By training up your children in the fear of God; by taking an interest in the spiritual welfare of your servants; by using your influence to get your husband and family to attend the house of God; by advising your children to join the Church, and, what is better, join the Lord Jesus; by having family worship in your home—you can have in a real sense 'a church in the house.'

And I tell you it is the church *in* the house that makes the church *outside* the house. Luther has truly said, 'The hearth is the centre of religion.' If the fire is feeble there, it is not likely to be warm anywhere else. What our land needs most to-day is 'the church in the house.' An English poet once sang of Scotland:

> 'O Scotland, much I love thy tranquil dales;
> But most on Sabbath eves, when low the sun
> Slants through the upland copse, 'tis my delight,
> Wandering and stopping oft, to hear the song
> Of kindred praise arise from humble roof.'

How refreshing when walking home on a Sabbath evening to hear through the window the song of evening worship. Where such exists there is usually a 'Priscilla' in the house.

III. The third loyalty I note in Priscilla was her loyalty to *truth*. While our worthy couple were still at Ephesus a most interesting preacher arrived from Alexandria. This was Apollos, an eloquent preacher, and 'mighty in the Scriptures.' He had, however, a serious defect. The only Jesus he knew was an ethical Jesus, that is, Jesus as a preacher of righteousness, the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus as prophet, but not as priest and king. He declaimed passionately against sin; called on men to repent and turn to Jesus. But when you asked what turning to Jesus meant, he was very vague and left you in the mist.

Priscilla and Aquila listened with pleasure, mingled with great pain. He was so gifted, so earnest; but so long as he preached mere morality they felt he would do little good. But how guide him? It was a delicate thing to tell a gifted preacher, fresh, perhaps, from

the University of Alexandria, that his preaching was radically defective. Yet they must do it: so one night we may imagine Priscilla inviting him to their house after the sermon, and when supper was over, beginning the delicate task. 'They instructed him in the way of God more perfectly.' Fed as they were on Paul's 'strong meat,' we need have little doubt as to what that instruction would be. It would begin with atonement through the blood of Christ. It would go on to salvation through faith in that blood. And it would close with the fruits of holy living, due to the Presence of Christ in the believer, through the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

As they dwelt with glowing hearts on these precious truths, Apollos forgot to be offended. His candid mind received the truth as a little child, and he who before knew only the baptism of John, knew now the baptism of the Holy Ghost. A change passed over his preaching analogous to what took place in the preaching of Thomas Chalmers when he rose from the sick-bed in the manse of Kilmany. The preacher of sin became now a preacher of salvation. The teacher of morals became an ambassador of Christ.

Shortly after Apollos went on to Corinth, and there preached his new-found gospel with such fervour that he even eclipsed the success of St. Paul in that city. It may be Paul delicately refers to that when he speaks of that debt which not only *he* owed to Aquila and Priscilla, but 'the whole Church of God' as well.

How tactful Priscilla must have been to instruct a preacher! Preachers don't relish that kind of instruction. Had she absented herself from his ministry, as so many do; had she hinted to others, or even to himself, that he was not 'sound,' Apollos would have likely been offended and perhaps lost to Evangelicalism. Priscilla did none of these things. By her tactful, loving speech she won to a full-orbed gospel one who became afterwards one of the greatest preachers of the early Church.

Christian workers, be tactful! I remember once, when a student, being taken round a very low district by a parish sister. She evidently thought me a very callow youth, and was determined to show me 'how to do it.' Her methods were peremptory. She ordered the people to the meeting, much as

you would order children to bed. At one house-door the man appeared with the usual answer that 'he had no time to go to meetings.' 'But you 'll have time to go to hell,' she pleasantly responded. He was immediately transformed into an infuriated animal. He followed us down the stairs with volley after volley of curses. I was glad to get out, as, not caring to lay hands on her, he seemed inclined to have it out with me. As I went home that night I thought my sister had given me a very good lesson—how *not* to do it. How different the reply Spurgeon gave to an actress. His son tells that, at the beginning of his ministry in London, an actress sang a song in a local theatre in gentle ridicule of the new preacher. Some one wrote to her, and she replied by sending a copy of the song to Spurgeon, and adding that if he thought it in the least degree offensive, she would at once cut it out. Spurgeon replied by thanking her for her courteous letter. As to her question whether the song transgressed the bounds of good taste, he preferred leaving the matter to herself, and he did so *with perfect confidence in the writer of such a letter*. Needless to say, the offence was never

repeated, and we may believe no sting was left in the breast of the offender.

Loyalty to truth, *with love*—that is what we see in Priscilla. Truth and love are often foes. Love wishes to give compliments, but truth deals only in sincerities. Yet truth is always in the end the purest love. Aquila was all the better minister because he had a wife who dared to tell him his faults, and yet did it in so sweet and winning a way that he was not depressed but only helped by it.

IV. Last and best of all, Priscilla was loyal to the *Lord Jesus*. The final notice of her is in Second Timothy, Paul's last letter, written within a few months of his martyrdom. There are no long lists of friends in that letter. Paul had no time for that. Three only are mentioned out of Ephesus, and two of these are our friends. 'Salute Prisca and Aquila.' Nearly ten years have gone since last we saw them. We are glad to know they are still united, best of all still loyal to Jesus. Amid the faltering faith of many in that time of abounding iniquity they were true.

We have no further reference to them in history, but tradition has been busy with

their names. There is a very old church on the Aventine in Rome which is dedicated to Priscilla, and tradition says it was originally 'the church in her house.' If that were so, she must have ended her days in the eternal city, as is very likely.

Some have gone the length of making her a great authoress. One of our best New Testament scholars[1] thinks she wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. He gives many plausible reasons for his suggestion, but it is more likely that if she wrote the 'Hebrews,' she did so with the pen of Apollos.

However true these things may be, one thing we may be pretty sure of—Priscilla would be faithful to the end. How she 'laid down her neck' at the last, we do not know. Whether she perished as a martyr, facing perchance 'the lion's gory mane' in the Colosseum, or gently slept away in Jesus in the quiet of that house she had so often made a temple of God, shall only be known when the Books are opened. Enough that she was loyal to the end, faithful unto death.

The Church of Christ has never quite got the length of ordaining women to be

[1] Harnack.

ministers; but some surely are ordained to be ministers' wives, and of these one of the first and the noblest was this ancient Roman lady, loyal to her husband, loyal to the Church, loyal to the truth, and, best of all, loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ.

XIX

THE WOMAN OF GREAT FAITH

'O woman, great is thy faith.'—MATT. xv. 28.

A RECENT writer in the *Spectator* has truly remarked that one of the most pathetic incidents in the sinking of the *Titanic* was one of the last cries heard out of the struggling waters. It was told by a man who had literally swum off the sinking deck. A group of men had been standing near the 'Bar' having a last 'free drink.' They were simultaneously pitched into the water. 'When we came up there was a great shouting,' said the survivor, 'but I could only make out one voice distinctly. It was a cry, "Mother! Mother!"'

There is, as the *Spectator* says, something pathetic in that cry. This was a grown-up man, possibly with wife and children, and yet in the last tragic moment, as the waves were closing over his 'dying brain,' his thoughts went back to the cry of the cradle.

The beginning, it was also 'the end of love.'

It is this cry for motherhood we see beautifully answered in this story of the woman of Canaan. As we read the record of her pleading persistence, in the face of the long silence of Jesus, we cannot help saying, 'O woman, great is thy mother's heart! O woman, great is thy love!'

Yet that is not what Jesus says. He does not say, 'Great is thy love.' He says, 'Great is thy faith.' Why? Not because He thought little of love. On the contrary, love was the burthen of His whole ministry. He came to teach a world of hate that God was love.

But He does not marvel at her love, because He knows there is nothing to marvel at there. What mother would not love? He would marvel rather if she did not love. But what He does wonder at is the faith in which that love finds expression. Paul was the apostle of faith, and therefore he sings the hymn of love. Jesus was the Apostle of Love, and therefore He sings the hymn of faith. It was this faith He was always seeking and seldom finding. 'When the Son of Man

cometh shall He find faith.' And therefore, when He did find it, He rejoiced with a great joy. 'O woman, great is thy faith!'

I. How was this woman great in faith? She was so, first of all, because hers was an *unexpected faith*. She was a woman of Syrophœnicia, Mark tells us—a land where you would naturally expect neither purity of love nor nobility of faith. Its people were worshippers of Moloch and Astarte, hideous names that are synonyms for cruelty and lust. Yet it was out of this dismal swamp Christ plucked this beautiful flower of faith. Of her, as truly as the centurion, might He have said, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'

It is possible to be a Christian anywhere. There are some flowers which grow only on the mountain and some that bloom only in the valley; some whose blossoms shed their fragrance only under tropic skies, and some that surprise the snows of January in our northern latitudes. But faith is a flower that can grow anywhere. The woman of Canaan teaches you that. She came from a race whose 'religion' is one of the darkest

records in the annals of superstition, and yet out of such an environment there comes one of the fairest stories of love and faith in all the Bible.

Perhaps I address some one here whose life makes his faith a difficult thing. Extreme poverty can do that. There are thousands living in one-roomed houses, in dark slums, in dreary tenements, surrounded with vice and crime on every side, for whom faith is a very difficult thing. Yet not an impossible one. Some of the noblest Christians I have known have thus dwelt 'where Satan's throne is.' And extreme wealth too makes faith a hard thing. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle——'; yes, difficult, but 'with God all things are possible.' Surrounded by the enervating influences of pleasure and sins of every kind, you may yet be a Daniel in Babylon, a 'saint in Cæsar's household.'

You can be a Christian anywhere, I repeat. And the man who is a Christian in a hard place is often the best Christian of all. When a man finds it hard to get to Christ, he finds all the more when he gets there.

A believer in Syrophœnicia is a hero in Israel. 'O woman, great is thy faith!'

II. That brings me to the second thing about this woman's faith. It was a *mightily persistent faith.* It refused to be conquered.

That, of course, is the most striking feature of the story—the silence of Jesus, and the faith that would not be silenced. When first we meet her she is crying a piercing heart-broken cry, 'Have mercy on me, Thou Son of David. My daughter is grievously vexed with an unclean demon. Have mercy on me.' And He, what does He answer to that cry—He whose ear was ever open to the prayer of human need? 'He answered her never a word.' It is the strangest incident in all the life of Jesus—His silence to this broken-hearted mother's cry.

What is the meaning of it? For surely it has a meaning. Silence has its meaning as well as speech, and its meanings are often more subtle. As Phillips Brooks puts it: 'Nature's silences are full of speech, and how diverse they are! There is the silence of sunrise, all tremulous with hope, and there is the silence of sunset, wrapt in the stillness of

its memories. There is the silence of noontide in the great forest, and there is the silence on the dark mountain in the dreadful pauses of the storm. There is the silence of the placid lake, sweet and attractive, and there is the silence of the fetid pool, sinister and deterrent. There is the silence of the sleeping child in its cradle, and the silence of the old man lying dead in his coffin. There is the silence of life and the silence of death.'

And what is true of inanimate things is not less true of human intercourse. One man sits silent in my room and his presence fills me with fellowship. Another sits speechless there, and I rack my brains to fill up the void. Your test of a friend is, that you can be silent with him. The highest, deepest, gladdest, saddest moments in life are moments of silence —the silence of a joy too full for speech, and the silence of a sorrow no tongue can utter.

'Break, break, break
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.'

If that be true of every man, most of all was it true of Christ. If He 'spake as never

man spake,' He was silent as never man was silent. Why, then, was He silent here? Some have said it was to test this woman's faith. He knew she would conquer all through. As Dr. John Ker puts it: 'He knew the strength of faith that was in her heart, and wished to bring it out for the perfecting of her own spiritual nature and for an example to us.' That was the view of the old writers, of St. Chrysostom, for example.

But the best recent interpreters of the mind of Christ have refused to take this view. They hold, and I think rightly, that it puts the Saviour in a theatrical and even insincere light. It makes Him pretend to refuse what He is really intending to give. Above all, they think that the harshness of His words at the close cannot be explained on this view. Why vivisect a mother's aching heart? No; Christ was surely in dead earnest when He said, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.'

What, then, is the meaning of it? It is not enough to say she was a foreigner; for, though it was true that His mission was to

'the lost sheep of the house of Israel,' and only through them to the world, yet we have abundant proof elsewhere to show that when a real need presented itself, He was willing to be the Good Samaritan to every brother in adversity. Such were the Roman centurion, the Samaritan leper, the woman at the well of Samaria. Moreover, this does not explain any better the harshness of His refusal. 'It is not meet to cast the children's bread to dogs.' Why add insult to injury? Why intensify the pain of refusal with contempt?

What, then, is the explanation? The best I have seen is that of my old teacher, Professor A. B. Bruce.[1] He points out the biographical setting of this story. It happened when the Cross was just coming into the clear view of Jesus. A little before He had received news of John's cruel death—a foreshadowing of his own. Shortly after He made His great announcement of His fast-approaching Passion to the disciple band. On that occasion, you remember, Peter tried

[1] *Expositor*, fifth series, iv. 38. See also a very fresh application of it by Rev. John Reid, M.A., *The First Things of Jesus*, p. 36.

to turn Him from the Cross with a kindly intentioned remonstrance. But the Master met His disciple's interference with a rebuke of extraordinary severity, 'Get thee behind Me, Satan!' He cried. He saw in Peter's words a temptation of the devil, 'changed into an angel of light.' It was the same as He had already conquered in the wilderness —to choose the path of honour and glory instead of the way of the Cross.

It was this same temptation, says Bruce, that assailed the Saviour here. He had come aside into the quiet to meditate on the solemn crisis at which He had now arrived. As He does so the old temptation confronts Him in a new form. Why not turn aside to the Gentile world? His gift of miracles would make Him a hero and perhaps a king there. He need not end His days on a cross.

A writer of to-day, Mr. Coulson Kernahan, has curiously enough put this very thought into a little story, *The Man of No Sorrows*. It is the story of a modern Saviour, identical with the old One, save that He has *no* sorrows, either for Himself or His disciples. The Cross is eliminated.

Now, it was just this elimination of the Cross that presented itself to Jesus in this woman's innocent request. To Him it practically meant—Leave Your ungrateful ministry among the Jews. Use Your power among the Gentiles. You need not die. You may become a beloved prophet of the world in some hospitable city in the West.

Hence the stern silence of Jesus. Hence His sterner words when He at length was forced to break it. 'The children must first be fed. I am not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.'

Such was the meaning of this eloquent silence of Jesus. It was no artifice of love. It was a real refusal. This woman felt that. She knew she had a battle to fight. Yet she refused to be beaten. She followed on, crying and weeping, right into the house where Jesus was. There she falls at His feet and sobs out the piteous prayer, 'Lord, help me,' until at last even *He* is moved to speak.

Now, what does all that teach us? Surely the power of persistent prayer. There are moments when God seems silent to us also.

Our cry goes up, but He answers 'never a word.' We say, 'Be not silent unto me, O Lord, lest if Thou be silent I be like unto these that go down into the pit.' Among the dark experiences of life there are none so dark as this. As Richter puts it, 'The universe becomes like a bottomless eye-socket, blank with the void from which God Himself has disappeared.'

Why is God thus silent? No doubt often to test us. 'When He hath tried us, we shall come forth as gold.' But this story suggests to us that God *may have other reasons for His silence than merely to educate our faith*; nay, more, that *these reasons can be overcome by persistent prayer*. This is a great mystery; but it is a fact in the history of the intercession of the saints.

So was it now. Reluctant as Jesus would appear to have been at this time to do anything to distract Himself from His great work, He yet felt that there was something in this woman's faith to make an exception possible. 'Because of this saying, the devil is gone out of thy daughter,' He said: and when she went home, she found her child lying healed upon the bed.

III. What was the saying? That brings us to the last crowning quality of this woman's faith—its *spiritual insight.*

This comes out in her marvellous rejoinder to what must seem to many the sternest word ever spoken by the Son of Man to a seeking soul, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.'

However we explain this saying, it has a harsh and forbidding tone about it. There is indeed only one thing that can explain it fully—that, like the similar word to Peter we have already referred to, it was not really spoken to the woman at all, but rather to the temptation of which she was but the instrument. It was a symptom of the deep spiritual conflict going on within—*His Divine Purpose to die* and *the call of His Humanity to live.*

This is the deep secret of this harsh word of Christ; yet there is one thing in the saying which softens it. It is the word we have translated—'*dogs.*' There are two words for that in the New Testament. One is the common word, used of those homeless pariahs which roam about all Eastern cities and feed upon the garbage of the town. Christ does

not use *that* word. There is another term; a diminutive, doggie or terrier, which was applied to the pet dogs of the home. It is this word Christ uses here. It is as if He had said, 'It is not right to take the children's dinner and give it to your terrier,' and it is this the woman now takes hold of. With a woman's wit, sharpened by a mother's love, she cries, 'Truth, Lord! Yet Your terrier does not starve. It gets the dinner scraps. It is only a scrap I want, as it falls from the rich table of Your Grace. Only the life of my little child! Only a scrap to such a Royal Table as Yours.' Who could refuse a faith so humble, so pleading, and yet so clever and tactful?

There is a mighty power in tact. Many a quarrel has been prevented by a wise word. This woman shows beautiful tact in her faith. And where did she get it? I answer, from the greatest of all givers, from Love. As George Macdonald says, 'The quickness of her answer was the scintillation of her intellect under the glow of her affection. Love is the quickening nurse of the whole nature.'

And yet it was not her cleverness, her tact,

that conquered the Saviour. No; it was her *faith*. 'O woman, great is thy faith!' He realised, from this word of hers, that she had penetrated into the meaning of His refusal; that she understood that His life-work had to be for His own people, and that it was right it should be so. That she knew *why* it must be so, would be too much to say. She could not understand yet why it was necessary that 'this Prophet must not die out of Jerusalem.' But she realised that it was Christ's mission to confine His ministry to His own people, and it was for this reason, as well as for her passionate and persistent love, Jesus felt that there was no temptation here to desert His mighty task. This was a case so exceptional as to justify legislation for itself alone. 'And He said unto her, For *this* saying the devil is gone out of thy daughter. O woman, great is thy faith! Be it unto thee as thou wilt.'

And what is the great lesson of it all? Is it not this? *The silence of God is often the prelude to His richest speech.* You know what it is to come to a pause in the music of some great composition, some symphony by

Beethoven or some oratorio by Handel. At a signal from the conductor there is a sudden silence, a silence over the vast orchestra that may be felt. Every violin has ceased to throb, every cornet has ceased to sound, until, after a breathless moment that seems to quiver with the tenseness of its expectancy, the conductor lets his baton fall. Then, in a twinkling, every instrument takes up its strain again. The violin makes the music; the cornets prolong it. The drums boom it forth. The cymbals clash it. The organ adds to it the weight of its mightiest diapason, until, in a perfect blaze of melody, the music reaches its close. The pause was but the prelude to the climax.

So in life there come, as I have said, times when God seems silent. He seems deaf to our entreaty. He is regardless of our need. At such a time we are tempted to say, like a woman to a friend of mine, 'If there is a God, which I very much doubt, He is a hard, cruel God.'

The woman of Canaan teaches us a grander lesson. To press 'through the darkness up to God'; to 'follow on to know the Lord'; to say with Job, 'Though He slay me, yet

will I trust in Him.' To such the morning will come. The long night of sorrow will pass at last. 'God shall arise, and we shall shine with brightness in His sight.' God will speak; speak a word whose music shall fill our days with melody. 'O man, O woman, great is thy faith! Be it unto Thee as Thou wilt,' for 'Thy will is mine.'

XX

THE WOMAN OF FEEBLE FAITH

'She said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. . . . But Jesus said . . . Thy faith hath made thee whole.'—MATT. ix. 21, 22.

ONE of our most spiritual writers [1] has an interesting essay on 'How to deal with our Interruptions.' He points out that, while most busy men welcome interruptions much as they would the visit of a tiger or a cobra, Jesus used them as the occasions of His noblest works. It was so with some of His finest parables: it was so with this miracle.

It is a miracle within a miracle. Jesus is going on an errand of life and death. In such an hour we would resent an interruption with what seems a just resentment. But Jesus made use of it to do one of His most beautiful works. 'He that believeth shall not make haste,' and there was no hurry

[1] Dean Goulburn.

in the perfect life. '*Ohne Hast: ohne Rast*' was His motto.

Is there not here a lesson for us. In the life of Norman Macleod it is told that, on a busy Saturday night, he was visited by a young German. He had been asked by his father, a German pastor, to inquire of two Glasgow ministers about a certain institution. He had gone to one that afternoon, his only free day, and had been received with little cordiality. He was told never to worry ministers on a Saturday. He had come on to Dr. Macleod with diffidence, urged only by the desire to gratify his father. Dr. Macleod received him courteously. He believed he had a pamphlet which would give the desired information; but after a long search it could not be found then. 'But I 'll find it,' said the doctor, 'and send it at the beginning of the week.' As he was going away Macleod said, 'Do you smoke?' 'Yes,' said the man. 'Well, then, have a talk,' said the doctor, and among other things he asked him what church he attended. 'None,' said the man. 'I am so busy at my engineering all the week that I need Sunday for a holiday.' The doctor gently pointed

out that he had a soul needing exercise as well as a body. The seed fell on good ground, watered as it was by the doctor's kindly treatment. From that day the young man became the doctor's constant hearer. His sermon had perhaps lost an extra polish by that interruption, but he won a soul.

May we not be too absorbed in our work? Would it not be well for us to cultivate a little of Christ's spirit of detachment?

> 'A heart at leisure from itself
> To soothe and sympathise.'

I have called this woman '*the woman of feeble faith.*' Some of you may wonder at that. You may think this woman's faith as great as that of the woman of Syrophœnicia. And so it was in a way. Yet it was a feeble faith nevertheless. It was mingled with much ignorance and superstition. The lesson it teaches us is that faith, however imperfect it is, if it be real faith, will yet touch the Saviour and win His glorious reward. 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed . . . and it shall be done.'

How was this woman's a feeble faith? It

was so, first of all, because it was a *bankrupt* faith. It was the discipline of failure brought her to Christ. The sad story of her life is told by St. Mark. 'She had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered but rather grew worse.' The medicine of these days was very different from the noble science of healing to-day. It was a compound of superstition and empiricism more akin to that of the medicine-man of savage lands to-day than to its modern representatives with us. Its patients were indeed sufferers.

But the heart of man is ever the same. As we see this poor body scouring the country for one new doctor after another, we see a sight too familiar still. 'Hopeless' is a hard word to receive. The race for health is a long race and it usually ends in the grave.

So had it been with this poor woman. Hers had been a weary race for health, and the sad goal was now not far off. Would she have come to Christ sooner had she known of Him? One cannot tell. At all events she is typical of many a soul. They only come to the Good Physician when they have

failed everywhere else. Christ is the last resource.

Is that an ideal faith? Is it worthy of God to give Him only the residue of your wasted life? Is it fair to make Jesus your *dernier ressort*? I will not say He will not receive you. He is able and willing to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. But be sure of this, that never a man delayed his coming to the Saviour who did not bitterly regret it. 'Too late loved I Thee,' cries Augustine. 'Too late loved I Thee, O Thou beauty of ancient days.'

Yet there is one thing about such a faith that makes it always great. It is a *desperate* faith. It is a self-despairing faith. It has no temptation to make reservations and 'go halves' with God.

> 'Nothing in my hands I bring,
> Simply to Thy Cross I cling'

is the burden of its song. It has learnt its own weakness too well not to be willing to cast itself all on God. And for this Jesus loves it: for this He accepts it. May it not be so with some of you? You have wandered far in search of healing, and always come

back sorrowing and unblest. What is your experience but a signpost pointing you to the Great Physician, bidding you press through the crowd to touch the hem of Jesus' robe ?

Once more, this woman's was an *ignorant* faith. That comes out in her self-communings as she resolved to make trial of the new Healer of Nazareth. 'If I may but touch His garment I shall be whole.' At first sight that looks a very wonderful faith. It seems to mean that she had such an exalted view of the Saviour that she imagined the virtue lay even in His clothes. But when we connect it with her action, we see it was something very different from this. She appears to think she can get a blessing from Christ's clothes without the conscious co-operation of Christ Himself. She seems to imagine that His body is a kind of galvanic battery which radiates healing without any spiritual or ethical element in it at all. This may be faith, but it is faith mixed with a great deal of superstition. It is the faith of the fetish-worshipper, not the faith of a Christian.

And yet how many Christians there are

whose faith is little better! I remember once saying to a German girl—a Catholic—'When do you go to church?' 'When you are fast asleep,' she said; 'at half-past five in the morning.' 'Dear me!' I replied; 'you must be very religious to go to church at that hour.' 'It is not that,' she said with a smile, 'but Mass is only half an hour then, and so I get my religion done by six o'clock in the morning and have the rest of the day to myself.' She was a kind and sweet girl, and I believe was better than her words. But as it stood, what a confession! Religion was something to be got over, instead of entering like a rich accompaniment into the song of her life.

Now that is just touching Christ's clothes. The clothes of religion, as the Great Philosopher of Clothes reminds us, are its outward forms and rites, its sacraments and creeds, its institutions and tithes. These things are necessary, for the spirit must ever have a body for its investiture. But though religion needs clothes, it must always be more than clothes. And often, alas! it is far less. The clothes are not only old and ill-fitting, but they cover a dead Christ, like

those old monks in the cemetery of the Capuchins in Rome, where you see a grinning skeleton peering out beneath the friar's cowl.

So with multitudes to-day. As St. Ambrose says, 'Multitudes press on Christ in outward ordinances, but believers alone touch Him.' They come to church, observe its sacraments, pay its dues, recite its creeds, but alas! its spirit never enters them, never touches their heart, never moulds their life. They practically say, 'If I may but touch His clothes, I shall be whole.' No, my brother, Christ's clothes alone will never make you whole. You must come in contact with more than these, else you will be like the thronging multitudes, jostling around Him but still unblest.

It was not so with this woman. Her actions went deeper than her words, as they often do. As she pressed through to touch His clothes to her poor thinking, she was really pressing through to touch Himself. It is a lesson to us that a superstitious faith may often be a very real faith. When Henry Martyn, the missionary, once saw in a Spanish church a poor old body weeping over a stone image of the Virgin, he reflected

that, however much her knowledge might fall short of his, very probably in faith and love she was his superior, and that it is by faith and love we are 'accepted in the Beloved.'

So must it have been with this woman. What she *said* was, 'If I may touch His *clothes*.' What she *did* was to touch *Himself*. Notice the words of Jesus[1]—'Who touched *Me*? Somebody hath touched *Me*, for virtue is gone out of *Me*.' It is not the clothes, my brother, you have to touch. It is the Christ within the clothes. You are here to-night, like these multitudes around the Christ, pressing upon Him. You can hear the very rustle of His robe as He passes through this church to-night. Oh! won't you touch Him, then, and be healed of your plague as this woman was?

You say, What is it 'to touch' Him? It is to have faith in Him—faith that lays hold of Him as your all-sufficient Saviour; faith that ventures its all upon Him. May the Holy Spirit give you that faith—that power to touch the living Christ even now! You can never know what salvation is till, like this woman, you *touch Him*.

[1] As recorded by Luke (viii. 45, 46).

And then there comes the last thing, to *confess Him.* That is the third element in which this woman's faith was defective. It was a *secret faith.* She came stealing in the crowd to touch the hem of His garment. Why the hem? Because it was the part He was the least likely to feel. She is very secret, very different from our woman of last chapter, as she comes calling all along the way, 'Have mercy on me, Thou Son of David.'

No doubt there was some excuse for her timidity. Her malady might well have excused her. Her frequent disappointments might well have made her shrink from the sympathy of the crowd. For sympathy comes to us so often with rude inconsiderate hands that we would prefer the silence of indifference. So she resolves to bear this bitterness alone and let no stranger intermeddle with its pain.

But while I can excuse the secrecy of her coming, surely there was none for her going. Surely she owed some recognition to the Saviour who had healed her of her twelve years' sorrow. Jesus feels this, and hence He draws her forth from her trembling obscurity and bids her acknowledge all the truth. He

does so for three reasons. For His own sake He wishes to be thanked. The gratitude of His saved ones is sweet in His ears. 'Are there not ten cleansed, He cries, but where are the nine?' And He wishes it for her sake also. He wants to purify that faith of hers and teach her that it was not His clothes that made her whole but her faith in Himself—a faith that could as easily have saved her at the edge of the crowd as when she touched the hem of His garment. Most of all, He wishes it for the sake of others that they may see and believe.

There are timid Christians still who come to Jesus always 'by night,' and steal away not fully blest because unconfessed. They touch Him in the crowded congregation, but go away without any acknowledgment either to the minister or to their friends. The Lord does not like such timidity. He longs for your acknowledgment before the world, and He promises that if you are not ashamed of Him here, He will not be ashamed of you yonder.

But He wants your open confession still more for your own sake. He knows you will never be a robust Christian till you make it.

And yet how many shrink from that, especially young men! An Indian once gave it as his opinion that of all nations on the face of the earth, the Anglo-Saxon had the least courage in confessing his religion. I beseech you, lay aside your false cowardice. Come boldly forward and say, like the great apostle, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to me who believe it.' You will be a different man after such a confession, for 'with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.'

It was so apparently with this woman, for Eusebius, the earliest of our Church historians, who wrote some three centuries after this event, tells that he had witnessed in Cæsarea Philippi an interesting statue commemorative of this event opposite a house reputed by tradition to be hers. 'To this day, before the gate of her house, on a lofty block of stone, there stands a brazen sculpture. On the one side a woman drops on her bended knee with hands outstretched in supplication. Opposite to her stands a Man, erect and tall, becomingly clad in a mantle, who extends His hand to the suppliant. At

her feet springs a certain strange plant which rises as high as the hem of her garment. It is held to be an antidote to all forms of disease. This, they say, is a statue of Jesus Christ.'

Eusebius says that the statue was erected by the woman as a thankoffering to Christ, but we may doubt that part of the story if Mark is right in saying she had spent her all. But one thing it seems to prove, that the woman was ashamed no longer; that she became a missionary for Jesus henceforth; and that the town was afterwards so proud of her cure that it erected this monument to commemorate the event.

For that is the last great reason Christ would have for your open confession. You know not what blessing you may give to others. Come, then, my brother, and confess Him. It may be but the last thing that is needed to make your 'touch' of Christ a real lifegiving touch. Hide no longer in the darkness of cowardice and moral compromise. Come out boldly for Him in the home, in the church, in your business. Unfurl the colours. Wave them bravely for Jesus, and in so doing you will bring blessing not to yourself only but to all that are round about you.

XXI

THE SENTIMENTAL KIND OF WOMAN

'Touch me not.'—JOHN xx. 17.

LOVE for the dead lingers round the tenement of clay even when the life-giving spirit has fled. We cherish the casket, though the jewel is no longer there. We are therefore not surprised with the words with which this chapter opens: 'The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre.'

As she drew near she had troubled herself with the thought: Who shall roll away the stone?; but when she arrived she found, as we often do, that the sorrows we anticipate are different from the trials we experience. The stone no longer hinders; but alas! the grave it guards is empty. The enemies of Jesus, not content with His life, wish to desecrate the poor body. 'They have taken

away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him'; so she complains with sobs to One whom she cannot see, but 'supposes to be the gardener.'

But the Gardener speaks, and now she realises who it is. Gardener indeed! Yes, but not of earthly flowers. Gardener of souls in that garden of the Lord whose richest tree is the Cross, and whose sweetest flowers are faith and love.

'Jesus saith unto her, Mary! She saith unto Him, Rabboni!' and in rapture flings herself at His blessed feet, intending to bathe them with tears of joy, as once long ago she had washed them with tears of penitence.

But no! This time the offering of love is not accepted. Jesus saith to her, 'Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended.' Notice the strange '*for*.' It is the keynote of our text. It means that while there is a touch which is forbidden, there is also a touch that will one day be permitted. While she is no longer permitted to touch Christ in the flesh, there is a far more noble, because more spiritual touch, which will one day be allowed to all believers. 'Touch Me not, for I am

not yet ascended to My Father; but go unto My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, unto My God and your God.'

Our subject, then, is twofold:

I. *The woman who is forbidden to touch the Saviour.*

II. *The woman who is invited to touch.*

I. *Mary was forbidden the earthly touch.*

Why was this? Some have suggested that she lacked sufficient reverence. This is St. Chrysostom's view. But surely this is not satisfactory. Jesus did not forbid Thomas to touch Him. 'Reach hither thy hand,' He said, 'and thrust it into My side.' Surely Mary was as reverent as the doubter.

Others suggest the urgency of Christ. 'This was no time for lingering endearments,' says St. Gregory. '"The King's business requireth haste." Touch Me not, therefore, but go unto My brethren.' But surely a touch would not have taken long!

No, St. Augustine suggests a truer explanation when he says: 'It was done to teach Mary that there was a far higher way of touching Christ than with the hand of

flesh; the true way to lay hold of Christ was by the grasp of faith.'

Hitherto the Magdalene had known Christ chiefly 'after the flesh'; as a human friend who made sunshine in her life, as well as a Saviour who had delivered her from an awful death. And, woman-like, there may have mingled with the worship of the Saviour a certain love of Jesus as the man. Nor had Christ rejected this, knowing that in due season He would raise it to higher things. Now that season has come. Christ can be no longer an object of earthly affection. Soon He will be away beyond the clouds, an object no more of sight, but of faith. 'I ascend unto My Father.'

Yes; but there is another Christ—the Christ not 'after the flesh,' but after the spirit. He will never leave you. 'Lo, I am with you all the days! Touch Me therefore no more with this human touch; but prepare for the time when you can clasp Me in the arms of faith, nay, become one with Me in mystical union.'

Such is the lesson Christ would teach Mary here; and has it no application to-day? Are there no women to-day who

wish to touch Christ rather in the flesh than in the spirit? Yes, and men too. You all remember the child's hymn:

'I think, when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold,
I should like to have been with Him then;

I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,
That His arms had been thrown around me,
And that I might have seen His kind look when
He said,
"Let the little ones come unto Me."'

It is, no doubt, a pretty enough hymn for a child to sing; but it is only a childish wish after all. We have a far better way of knowing Christ than 'after the flesh.' 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man open the door, I will *come in to him*.'

Am I too much of a Puritan when I suggest there is a danger of making too much of *sacred art* in our worship of Christ? I hope not; for I love sacred art as much as any man, and have devoted many an hour to its study. And yet I do not think that the feelings suggested by sacred art will ever take the place of true worship. Art appeals to the imagination. Worship comes from

the conscience. And a religion that feeds on art, and art alone, is apt to become dreamy and sentimental, and lack the noble practical love which is the true fruit of a healthy faith.

I remember once visiting a wonderful church on the Rhine. It was a pilgrimage shrine. People came from all parts to see it. The whole of the interior was divided into grottos representing scenes in the life of Jesus. Here, *e.g.*, was His birth; a real stable, with stuffed oxen standing by looking down at wax figures of the Mother and Child. Here was the Baptism; a shining pool of water with all the verisimilitude to reality. But the masterpiece was the High Altar, where the drama of the Crucifixion was enacted with gigantic figures. The huge cross in the centre, with its august Sufferer hanging upon it, the thieves on each side, twenty or thirty figures of women, soldiers, and Pharisees standing round, all made up a wonderful scene. Beside it was the grave of Jesus. A slab of crystal guarding the tomb permitted you to gaze into the cave where, lit by a gentle radiance, the wounded body reposed.

Now, I said to myself, there needs only

one thing to make the story complete: the Resurrection. And for a moment I thought I had found that; for on the other side of the altar I saw a similar grave, but this time empty. 'A beautiful symbol,' I said to myself, 'of the Resurrection.' But no, I was wrong. It was not the Resurrection at all; it was only the Assumption of Mary. Thus the crown of all was wanting! It was only a Christ after the flesh that was worshipped here; not a Christ after the spirit.

A friend of mine who had visited the church told me he once saw a lady there, weeping as if her heart would break. Perhaps, had she grasped more truly the Easter message, her sorrow might have been turned into joy. 'Weep not, ye seek Jesus who was crucified. Why seek ye the living among the dead?' The true attitude of worship is not that which weeps over the dead Christ, but rejoices in the living one; not that which touches Him by sight, but holds Him by faith.

And is there not something, too, of this woman's spirit in the *attitude of modern Rationalism to Christ*?

There are men to-day who will not believe unless they get a proof that you can touch and taste and handle. 'Give me,' said Professor Huxley, 'two hospital wards; and let them pray for the patients in the one, and let them not pray for those in the other; and if the results in the one are better than those in the other, I will believe in prayer.'

To such an attitude Christ is silent. He speaks to the soul through other channels than those of logic or statistics. He comes through the deep inarticulate throbbings of a heart that craves for a Christ who can conquer death. He comes to the passionate aspirations of a soul that wants to be cleansed from sin. To such and such only Christ is revealed. To all who would come to touch Him with the test tube of the scientist, or handle Him with the irreverent hand of the materialist, Christ says, 'Touch Me not.'

II. Let us now pass to the second thought of our subject: *the touch that is permitted; the woman that is invited to touch.*

'Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended.' As one has said, you can read that text as well by taking out the two negatives:

'Touch Me, for I am ascended'; 'Touch Me *when* I am ascended.'

What do we mean by the Ascension? Do we mean simply that Jesus went up into the skies, until the cloud hid Him from the disciples' eyes? That is only a picture. The true meaning of the Ascension is grasped by Paul: 'He hath ascended . . . that He might fill all things.' The Ascension of Jesus was the resumption of His spiritual nature. While unascended, His was still a human body. Though it might have miraculous powers about it, it was essentially human, limited by time and place. It could not be omnipresent. It was only accessible to a few. Christ's Ascension was the assumption of His omnipresence. It was the fulfilment of His promise: 'Lo, I am with you alway.'

Thus, too, it marked Him off from other great men. All great men in one sense rise again. Shakespeare died, but rose again. Socrates died, but rose again. Luther died, but rose again. These men rise in the sense that their spirits never die. They grow in power and benediction with every new year. Death has no power over them. They live

in history. 'They rule the generations from their sceptred urns.'

They have a resurrection, *but not ascension.* You cannot say of them that they are with you. You cannot speak to them. You cannot get answers from them. You cannot put your hand into theirs. You cannot lean your head upon their breasts.

But this you can do with Christ. Just because He is ascended you can touch Him, touch Him as the woman did we were considering the other night, and like her be made whole; touch Him in every condition of life you may be in; touch Him in the city and in the solitude, touch Him in your going out in the morning and touch Him in your coming in at night, touch Him in the city street and the roaring factory, touch Him in the quiet of the secret place or in the peace of the mountain top. There is no place where you cannot touch Christ, and wherever you do touch Him the miracle of His grace is wrought: 'As many as touched Him were made perfectly whole.'

One place in which you may specially touch the Ascended Christ I may refer to in closing, as it is in our text here. You may

touch Him in *working for Him.* 'Touch Me not,' said Christ, 'but go to My brethren, and tell them I ascend unto My Father and your Father, unto My God and your God.'

You remember the old legend of St. Christopher, how the strong man found Him whom his soul loved in doing lowly service for the weak and the helpless. So we, too, touch the Christ whenever we lay a loving hand on the poor, the weak, and the helpless, when we lift them up out of 'the horrible pit,' and help to dry tears that are dropping from weeping eyes.

The poet Longfellow was once standing on the wild rocky shore of Massachusetts. It was gathering night, and as he looked out on the foam-crested waves he saw far off in the sea a lighthouse on an angry reef. Already it was casting forth its beams on the waters, warning the mariners as they passed of the danger, and pointing to the distant harbour in the bay beyond. To the poet it seemed a modern setting of the old story of the Christian giant, and he sat down and wrote the lines :

'Like the great giant Christopher it stands
Upon the brink of the tempestuous wave;
Wading far out among the rocks and sands,
The night o'ertaken mariner to save.'

A beautiful picture! May you and I be human lighthouses, casting the beams of a Saviour's love on the lost on life's sea, and pointing them to the harbour of eternal safety. To do that is to 'touch' Christ.

XXII

THE MOTHER OF THE GREAT SON

'They saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped *him*.'—MATT. ii. 11.

'Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also.'—LUKE ii. 35.

WHERE in our gallery of 'fair women' shall we find a place for the mother of our Lord? Surely she is unique. There is but one Jesus; there can be but one mother of Jesus. Yet our Bible womanhood will be sadly incomplete if her beautiful face finds no place there. Is there not one quality in which she may be a 'type of modern women'?

Certainly there is, and that the most practical. She comes before us pre-eminently as 'the mother of the great Son.' And in that is she not a type of many, nay, in a sense, of all mothers? All mothers have gifted children,—at least so they think. Poor is that mother, if she exists, who does

not see in her child some gift. No doubt these dreams are often sadly unfulfilled. And yet in one respect I verily believe they need never be unfulfilled. 'I will not have an irreligious child,' said Catherine Booth passionately, and she never had. Your children may not have the gifts of genius; they may all be great in grace.

Let us look at Mary from this point of view—as the 'mother of a great Son.' It is this that links her with us all, and it is this she would most love to be known by. Our first text brings her before us in that capacity. You may have thought, as I read it to you, that it had not much to do with Mary. 'They worshipped *Him*.' Not the Mother but the Child! Yes, but that is how Mary would have had it. Nay, that is how every true mother would have it. They who worship Mary instead of worshipping her Child give her an honour that would be in the last degree distasteful. Every true mother, and Mary most of all, would say, 'Give not your praises to me. I want them not. Enough that my Child be honoured. In Him I live; in His honour I rejoice.' As Stevenson has beautifully put it:

'. . . the fervent smith of yore
Beat out the glowing blade,
Nor wielded in the front of war
The weapon that he made;
But in the tower at home still plied
His ringing trade.
So like a sword the Son shall roam
On nobler missions sent,
And as the smith remained at home
In peaceful tower pent,
So sits the while at home, the Mother,
Well content.'

'They worshipped *Him*.'

What, then, does the Mother of a great Son teach us? This surely first of all: *If you would have a noble child, you must yourself be noble.* That Mary was a noble woman we might surely suppose from the fact that God chose her to be the mother of His only Son; but that she really was so we have abundant proof in the sacred record. In the *Magnificat*, that glorious song in which the gladness of her beautiful soul found expression, we have striking witness to that. It is one of the noblest psalms in Holy Scripture, beautiful in diction, exalted in feeling, and saturated with the knowledge of Scripture. It would take many sermons to expound its rich beauty. Here only we

may note the reflection it casts on the soul of her from whom it came.

It points first of all to her exquisite *purity*. Only a very pure soul could rejoice when God was coming so near it. Prophets and apostles before her and after had trembled at the approach of the Most High. 'Woe is me,' cried one of them, 'for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.' But Mary shows no fear at the tidings that the 'Holy Ghost should come upon her and the power of the Highest should overshadow her.' With simple faith she accepts the wondrous mystery. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord,' she says; 'be it according to Thy word.' And then, as she broods upon it, all her thoughts blossom into song. 'My soul doth magnify the Lord. My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.'

Note, too, her perfect *humility*. She magnifies her Lord, not herself. She acknowledges Him as her Saviour though her Child. Yes, Mother of the Lord as she is, she needs a Saviour as much as the poorest sinner of her sex. 'My spirit hath rejoiced,' not in God my Son, but 'in God my Saviour.' And the same note of gracious humility

sweetens all her song. She thinks of her lowly estate. How wondrous that God should come to her, a poor peasant maiden! All that has entitled *her* to such an honour is that she has longed and yearned for it more than any earthly glory. 'The hungry He hath filled with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away.'

Mothers, would you have noble sons, you must yourselves be noble. It is there you can be 'fellow-workers with God.' It is said of Charles Kingsley's mother that she 'believed that all the impressions made on her own mind before the birth of her child by the romantic surroundings of her Devonshire home, would be transmitted to him, and in this faith surrendered herself to the enjoyment of every sight and sound which she hoped would be dear to her child in after years.' These hopes were realised, and thirty years after, her son writes: 'I firmly believe in the magnetic effect of the place where one has been bred. The thought of the west country will make me burst into tears at any moment.' All the poetry of *Westward Ho!* and *The Water Babies* was thus, to some extent, a gift of his mother on the child's natal day.

And surely the case is still more true of the spiritual environment. No doubt there are exceptions; but when God makes a noble man, He usually first makes a noble mother. What Bonaparte said of France is universally true, 'What France needs is mothers!' Yes, what the world needs is mothers—mothers like Mary the Virgin, pure in heart, humble in spirit, and readers like her of the noblest literature, the Word of God.

But Mary teaches the mother a second lesson, and as valuable a one, in her training of her wondrous child. It is this: if you have a really great son, *do not spoil him by dilating on his greatness.*

If you had a child like Mary's; if he had come to you surrounded with the halo of wondrous visions, marvellous portents, gifts from wise men in distant lands, prophecies from saints of future greatness, would you have kept these things to yourself? Would you have hid them from your child? I trow not. You would have made your family at least aware of how wonderful was this, your first-born babe. Yet we read of Mary that 'she kept all these things and

pondered them in her heart.' Her mother's pride never unsealed her woman's reticence. She felt that these things were too great, too awful, to shadow her Child's boyhood with. She felt perhaps, too, it would expose Him to the envy and even hatred of His less gifted brothers and sisters, as Jacob's foolish fondness did. So she waited, quietly waited all these thirty years, knowing that God's destiny would come to Him in God's own time. 'She kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.'

Some mothers might learn from her a lesson in that. They never weary (but they often weary others) in expatiating on the glories of their offspring. They bore you to death by telling you of the wonderful things *John* said when he was quite a child; of the prizes and scholarships he won at school and college; of the speeches he makes, the sermons he preaches, the books he writes. What a paragon John must be! No doubt he is; but one would rather admire the paragon for oneself. One can only be sorry for John's sisters and brothers, who are called upon daily to worship at his sacred shrine. And one trembles for John himself, lest all this

incense should stain the picture and spoil the promise. Fortunately, if God has a work for John to do, He usually takes care to separate him from this sickly hothouse atmosphere. He sends him into the cold bracing winds of a public school—or a world of criticism. There, if not too late, 'the nonsense is knocked out of him.'

But how much better if, from the dawn of talent, a gifted child were taught a modest appreciation of his gifts and a wise sense of responsibility to Him from whom alone they have come! When Principal Rainy's mother heard of the rising fame of her son, she only wrote to a friend, 'Poor fellow! If God gives him grace, I am not afraid for his abilities.' That is the way a mother should treat her gifted son. Keep all these things in your heart, and pray for him. Pray that he may not be spoiled by conceit or indolence, but that he may use his gifts 'as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye.'

But, in the third place, we learn from Mary that if we have a great son, *we should have sympathy with his ideals and aspirations.*

I have said we learn this from Mary, but

we learn it rather by warning than by example. For, to say the truth, Mary hardly shows here as the ideal mother of a great son. There are three incidents in the Gospel records in which she is mentioned in the public ministry of Jesus, and in none of these does she quite rise to the same noble heights as in the gospel of the Infancy.

The first of these is the familiar Temple incident, when she almost ventures on rebuke—'Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.' The second is her undue intrusion into Christ's sacred trust of the miraculous, when at the marriage she says to Him, 'They have no wine.' The last and most perplexing is her failure to appreciate His divine mission, when she is found with His unbelieving brethren as they attempt to take Him away and confine Him as one who was 'beside himself.'

The two former incidents have been interpreted in her favour with more or less plausibility, but it is very hard to explain away the third one. It seems to indicate a misjudgment of His mission and character in one who should have been the first to appreciate both. How

had she fallen so far beneath the Mary of the Infancy? The two women are so different that some critics have not hesitated to say that it is impossible they should belong to the same character, and that 'the Higher Criticism' must solve the contradiction. But as we have already said, 'There is nothing more consistent than an idea; there is nothing less consistent than a character.' If the critics would only 'inquire within,' they would see in their own hearts far greater inconsistencies than are to be found in Mary. In fact, we believe it was just the glorious visions of 'the Infancy' that led this noble woman astray in her conception of what the mission of her gifted Son was to be.

Those of you who have seen Holman Hunt's 'Shadow of the Cross' will remember how Mary is employed when she gets the first awful premonition of what her Child's fate is to be. She is engaged—so the painter fancies her—looking into a coffer, where the gifts of the wise men are preserved, feasting her eyes on the beautiful crowns and bracelets and jewels, so prophetic, as she thinks, of what her Son's after-destiny is to be. And

then she turns, and what a contrast! There, in shadow on the wall, imprinted by the western light, she sees her son stretched on a cross! What a sight for a mother to see! As she looks, the solemn, mysterious words of Simeon flash through her heart, 'Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul!' Against that awful destiny her mother's heart rises up in arms, and it was, I believe, this love, this misguided love, that led her to seek to keep back her Child from His mission and point Him into a path of glory, not of shame; of royalty, not of sacrifice; of a crown, not of a cross.

But whatever be the explanation, the fact remains that Mary failed, only temporarily indeed, but still failed to enter fully into the ideals and aspirations of her Son in His last days, and that her failure to do so constituted not the smallest part of the loneliness of Christ. 'And He said, Who is My mother and who are My brethren?' and then, pointing to His few faithful disciples, He declared, 'Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.'

And the lesson which Mary teaches all

mothers by that failure is this: 'Try to sympathise with the *ideals* of your sons and daughters, even though you may not be always able to appreciate the *ideas* from which they spring. Do not attempt to tie them with the apron-strings of your own thoughts and fancies.

You remember how cruelly wounded Charles Dickens was by the failure of his mother to sympathise with the dreams of her gifted child. For the sake of a few pence she wanted to send one of the greatest imaginative geniuses the world has produced back to the dingy blacking factory! There are few mothers, one would hope, so unappreciative of their children as that. But in other ways you too may be blind to the best things in your boy or girl. You may try to limit them by your own ideas and education, and thus prove in the end one of their most dangerous foes—the foe in one's 'own household.'

Specially is this the case when, as in the case of the Saviour, the gifts of your child are of the 'prophetic' order. Women are too often apt to be worshippers of the *status quo*; and by trying to run all their

gifted children's thoughts into the moulds of the past, they may either seriously spoil their originality, or produce a painful breach between parent and child.

It is good to think that the breach between our Lord and His earthly Mother was only temporary. On the last dark day we read, 'There stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother.' The Bible tells us no more than this. It does not expatiate on the tremendous import of the scene; it expatiates on nothing. It writes for fact, not for effect. But its facts are their own best effects, and as we think of that picture, the words of the old prophecy pass with tragic emphasis into our mind, 'Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.'

One thing we know at least of Mary's sorrow there. It was silent. There was no cry of complaint, no bitter upbraiding of God or man at that last sad consummation of a mother's hopes. And when the Son gives her His last farewell, 'Son, behold Thy mother: woman, behold thy son,' in meek obedience she obeys, and silently moves away at His behest. And when in the future days the Resurrection and the day of Pentecost

made the mystery of sorrow clear to all His own, may we not be sure He came in the truest sense as 'Comforter' to her, to whom the darkness of the Cross had been most crushing?

That is the thought Titian so beautifully renders in his glorious 'Assumption of the Madonna' in the great Venetian Gallery. The framework of the picture is but legend; its truth is eternal. It depicts the soul of Mary as it passes after life's sorrows into the presence of God. The artist has painted her upturned face as it first catches sight of her Lord. It is a face of exquisite sweetness and beauty. And it is the face of the first Mary, the Mary of the *Magnificat*. Perfect faith is there, perfect joy, unsullied gladness. The piercing of the sword is now for ever past. But what most of all shines out from it, is its sweet adoring love; the love no more of a mother for her child, but of a ransomed soul for its Saviour. The lips, as they open in rapture, seem to be framing the words sung long ago, but now uttered with a deeper, richer melody than was possible to her then: 'My spirit *doth* rejoice in God, my *Saviour*.'

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